

UNITED STATES POLICY AND STRATEGY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

HEARING

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES UNITED STATES SENATE

ONE HUNDRED FIFTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2017

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U.S. POLICY AND STRATEGY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2017

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:00 a.m. in Room SD-G50, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Senator James Inhofe presiding.

Members present: Senators Inhofe, Wicker, Fischer, Cotton, Rounds, Ernst, Tillis, Sullivan, Perdue, Cruz, Sasse, Reed, Nelson, McCaskill, Shaheen, Gillibrand, Blumenthal, Donnelly, Kaine, King, Heinrich, Warren, and Peters.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR JAMES INHOFE

Senator INHOFE. The hearing will come to order.

The committee meets today to receive testimony on the U.S. policy and strategy in the Middle East.

First of all and foremost, I want to submit for the record the statement by Chairman McCain, who is not here today.

[The prepared statement of Senator McCain follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT BY SASC CHAIRMAN JOHN MCCAIN

Washington, DC—U.S. Senator Jim Inhofe (R-OK) submitted the following statement for the record on behalf of Senator John McCain (R-AZ), Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, today at a hearing on U.S. policy and strategy in the Middle East:

“The Senate Armed Services Committee meets today to receive testimony on U.S. policy and strategy in the Middle East.

“When we last met to discuss the region some months ago, the situation was vastly different than the one we see today. The United States and its coalition partners have achieved great success against ISIS, liberating its former capital of Raqqa and forcing it out of major cities across Iraq. The caliphate that terrorists claimed would overrun the Middle East has diminished significantly in physical size, despite the persistent influence of its ideology.

“Our achievements are worth celebrating. But our challenges in the region remain daunting despite our hard-won tactical victories. Our relentless and essential focus on destroying ISIS has obscured a troubling reality: the United States lacks a clear, comprehensive strategy that addresses the Middle East in all of its complexity.

“This is part of the unfortunate legacy that the last administration left for its successor. But nearly one year into this administration, we still lack clarity on essential questions about our nation’s role in the Middle East. We are left to observe the intensifying symptoms of a collapsing regional order as bystanders. While in some cases we are bystanders who take action, we do so with unstated and often unclear objectives.

“Our power and influence are diminishing in the Middle East as a result of our lack of direction, and the vacuum has been filled by forces working contrary to American interests. Consider the events that have swept the region in recent months.

“In Syria, the Assad regime—backed by Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah—has retaken significant territory but shows no signs of addressing the humanitarian crisis they largely created, which has destabilized nations throughout the region and could serve as the breeding ground for radicalization.

“In Iraq, tension between the Government of Iraq, Iranian-backed militias, a number of Kurdish factions, and a displaced Sunni population could transform next year’s election from a triumph for that nation into a setback that could pave the way for the resurgent sectarian tension and minimize America’s ability to support stability in the region. The recent terrorist attacks in New York show the persistent appeal of extremist ideology; its rise in the wake of U.S. withdrawal years ago demonstrates the danger of leaving before winning the peace.

“Lebanon was recently gripped by a political crisis in which Prime Minister Hariri resigned in Saudi Arabia under the cloud of foreign interference only to return home to reassume his authority—a welcome development given his role as a valued partner who supports peace and security amid divided government where Hezbollah plays a major role.

“A web of Iranian proxies and allies is spreading from the Levant to the Arabian Peninsula, threatening stability, freedom of navigation and the territory of our partners and allies, including with advanced conventional weapons. Iran itself continues to menace its neighbors, use its sanctions relief windfall to harmful ends, test ballistic missiles, and spread weapons throughout the region.

“According to our allies and partners, Houthi rebels in Yemen recently launched an Iranian-provided missile at the airport in Riyadh. Meanwhile, our Arab allies are embroiled in infighting and diplomatic disputes that weaken regional cooperation and coalition efforts in the face of these pressing threats.

“Saudi Arabia itself is in the midst of monumental change. The recent appointment of a new crown prince, the arrest of a number of prominent Saudi citizens, and the Kingdom’s ongoing war in Yemen—which has spawned a humanitarian crisis of its own—indicate a forcefulness that promises progress but also raises concerns about internal stability and regional conflict. Ultimately, it could serve to strengthen Saudi rivals.

“The President’s decision last week to recognize Jerusalem as Israel’s capital acknowledges what many of us have long believed—but it also raises issues that must be resolved by Israelis and Palestinians as part of a comprehensive, internationally supported diplomatic strategy to achieve lasting peace and security.

“Meanwhile, Turkey and Egypt are both poised to grow closer to Vladimir Putin’s Russia, which casts a long shadow throughout the region as it reestablishes itself as a power broker hostile to our interests and our values.

“These challenges are daunting, confusing, and complex. We know we cannot neglect them any more by virtue of hard experience—whether in light of Iran’s decades-long campaign targeting its independent-minded neighbors in the region as well as the United States or ISIS’s rise after America turned away from Iraq and Syria. We also know that if we keep sleepwalking on our current trajectory, we could wake up in the near future and find that American influence has been pushed out of one of the most important parts of the world.

“We must remain engaged in the Middle East because the stability of the region is vital to our national interests and international security alike. As we know, Middle Eastern instability travels far beyond its borders—not only in the form of terrorist attacks in places like Paris, Brussels, Ankara, the Sinai Peninsula, and San Bernardino or fluctuations in the global economy, but in the form of refugee crises, the proliferation of weapons, and human suffering magnified the world over.

“If we do not consolidate our recent gains in the Middle East and ensure that the United States and its partners are positioned to maintain a foothold and strong relationships in the region, we will end up facing down the same problems again and again as other demanding challenges elsewhere arise.

“Yet despite our current predicament, this moment is not without opportunities. The United States has numerous comparative advantages vis-a-vis our rivals and unique opportunities to contest influence with them in the region. The question is whether we will be resourceful enough to capitalize upon them and wise enough to use them carefully in view of our other commitments around the globe.

“Our witnesses are uniquely qualified to speak to how we should engage all elements of national power in this effort. Today, we welcome:

- “Ryan Crocker, Diplomat-in-Residence at the Princeton University and the former Ambassador to Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon;
- “Eric Edelman, Counselor at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments and former Under Secretary of Defense for Policy and Ambassador to Turkey;

- “James Jeffrey, Distinguished Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy and former Ambassador to Iraq and Turkey; and
- “Stuart Jones, Vice President of the Cohen Group and former Ambassador to Iraq and Jordan.

“Our witnesses are all distinguished veterans of our nation’s Foreign Service who, between them, possess over a century of experience as diplomats and national security policymakers focused on the Middle East. This kind of deep knowledge of, and experience with, our hardest challenges in the world is the reward we reap when we invest in the men and women of our State Department—and why it is more important than ever that our nation continue to do so.

“Given that we have once again enjoyed success on the battlefield against our most immediate foe, it seems appropriate to call upon our witnesses’ diplomatic experience to identify how we can consolidate our gains, seek political solutions, and ensure peace and security. At this critical juncture, winning the hard-fought peace in places like Iraq, strengthening our partnerships, and deterring our adversaries is perhaps even more of a diplomatic and economic matter than it is a military one—and we welcome your views on how our work overseeing the Department of Defense can support our country’s broader efforts.”

Senator INHOFE. We are joined this morning by a group that we all know well. You have all been before this committee. As I mentioned to you a minute ago, I think most of the members of this committee have seen you in action in the field.

Ambassador Crocker, you are a Diplomat-in-Residence with the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University. You have been all over the map in the last couple of decades.

Ambassador Eric Edelman, Counselor, Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments. By my account, this is your ninth appearance before this committee. Does that sound right to you? Yes.

Ambassador Jeffrey, the Philip Solondz Distinguished Fellow, Washington Institute for Near East Policy. I remember being with you in Turkey and other places.

Ambassador Stuart Jones, Vice President of The Cohen Group. Your presence was appreciated by, I think, every member here in both Jordan and Iraq.

So, it is great to have all of you here.

Much of our nation’s attention over the last two decades has gone toward the Middle East in terms of military operations, and that’s appropriately so. We faced very real and dangerous threats originating from the Middle East, and we’ve seen that the problems there are extremely complex. For example, we formed and led an international coalition to defeat ISIS [Islamic State of Iraq and Syria], and with our local partners on the ground in Iraq and Syria we have largely done that. Just last Saturday, Prime Minister Abadi announced the defeat of ISIS in Iraq.

So it’s long past time for us to turn our attention to the broader strategy and the national objectives in that region, as our competitors are already doing, Iran and Russia.

I’m very encouraged that under the leadership of President Trump, America is beginning to reclaim some of its worldwide leadership that has waned for the past eight years. In October, the Administration released an outline detailing a strategy to counter Iranian malign influence. The President also declined to certify the sanctions relief as a part of the Iran nuclear deal. That was something a lot of people didn’t realize, that the President has to, on a periodic basis, keep that alive. So we have started a process now, and I think it was the right decision.

The President also was encouraged by the recent activity that has taken place—by the way, some of us were with Netanyahu when that decision was made, and I’ve never seen a happier guy. At the same time, of course, he was very encouraged by the recent decision to move the United States Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, in concert with current law and broad bipartisan support. This is something that we decided to do 20 years ago, and finally we’re doing it. So that’s good news.

We have great witnesses. I look forward to the testimony.
Senator Reed?

STATEMENT OF SENATOR JACK REED

Senator REED. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I want to commend Senator McCain for scheduling this hearing and thank Chairman Inhofe for leading it today. It’s very important.

Also, let me thank the witnesses. I’ve had the privilege and pleasure of working with you. You have made invaluable contributions to the national security of the United States in so many different capacities. When Chairman Inhofe mentioned that Ambassador Edelman had been nine times here, I think you’re all recidivists, in a very positive way. So, thank you very much. We are indeed fortunate to have you here today. I’m very confident you’re going to provide valuable insights for a very challenging area of the world, the Middle East.

Working with our partners on the ground, we have made great progress in our efforts to dismantle the so-called ISIS caliphate. According to the United States Central Command, in the last three years the coalition has liberated more than 4.5 million people and 52,000 square kilometers of territory from ISIS control. This is a significant achievement for the coalition and our Iraqi and Syrian partners.

It is also important to recognize that ISIS, al Qaeda, and other violent extremists are not yet defeated and remain intent on attacking the United States and our interests, while taking advantage of opportunities afforded by destabilization in the Middle East. Despite our operational success since ISIS, we have not achieved similar success in addressing the political and social challenges in the Middle East that gave rise to ISIS in the first place. Our efforts to deal with ISIS, al Qaeda and others, to deal them a lasting defeat must not rest with the Department of Defense alone. Sustainable solutions will require significant contributions from the State Department, USAID [United States Agency for International Development], and others.

Unfortunately, our ability to achieve such a whole-of-government approach is hampered by massive proposed cuts to the State Department’s budget and the fact that our current diplomats are leaving government service at an alarming rate.

Each of you has deep experience in utilizing the non-military tools of our national power, and I hope you will provide the committee with your views on how such tools can be more effectively leveraged.

Violent extremism is not the only national security challenge facing the United States in the Middle East: the success of the Ira-

nian nuclear deal in putting a halt to the greatest threat facing the United States and our allies in the region, namely a nuclear-armed Iran; the Quds forces and its proxies continue their campaign of malign and destabilizing activities across the region, most notably in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. Coupled with an increasingly assertive foreign policy exhibited by Saudi Arabia, it is hard to imagine the geopolitical landscape in the Middle East being more complicated than it is today.

If we are to successfully navigate these challenges, we need to be clear in communicating our values and objectives. From the retweeting of anti-Muslim rhetoric to last week's announcement concerning the United States Embassy in Israel, the President has repeatedly made it more difficult for our national security and diplomatic professionals to do their jobs. The risk of failed United States policy in the Middle East is significant, and we can't afford any unforced errors.

I again want to thank our witnesses not only for being here today but for their significant contribution to our country through their decades of work in the Foreign Service. I look forward to your testimony. Thank you very much.

Senator INHOFE. Thank you, Senator Reed.

We'll start with you, Ambassador Crocker.

All of you know that we try to keep our comments down to about five minutes and give our well-attended meeting here time to ask questions.

Ambassador Crocker?

STATEMENT OF AMBASSADOR RYAN C. CROCKER, DIPLOMAT-IN-RESIDENCE, WOODROW WILSON SCHOOL OF PUBLIC AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

Ambassador CROCKER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Reed, members of the committee. It's a privilege to be here today.

The timing, I think, is fortuitous. We are at, in my view, a strategic inflection point with the military defeat of Islamic State to try to answer the "now what?" question. As you both said, the military defeat is necessary but, I would suggest, not sufficient. I think it is helpful to remember what happened when I was in Iraq, 2009 through the surge. We just pounded Islamic State's predecessor, al Qaeda in Iraq, but we could never quite eliminate them. They would find little crevices in Mosul and up the Euphrates River Valley.

Why did they find them? It's important to remember, then as now, that al Qaeda in Iraq and Islamic State are not, in and of themselves, the problem. They are the symptom of the problem. The problem has been—and this goes throughout the region—the failure to establish good governance, the failure to establish rule of law and institutions where all citizens in Iraq, and now in Syria, feel safe. That has not happened.

To take, again, the 30,000-foot view, if one looks at the modern Middle East, which is roughly 100 years old—it grew out of World War I and the Versailles Treaty of 1919—if there is one single consistent point of failure, it is governance. We have seen "isms" come and "isms" go—imperialism and colonialism under the British and

the French; monarchism in some of the central countries like Egypt and Iraq; Arab nationalism personified by Nassar; undiluted military authoritarianism, again in Iraq; Arab socialism in Iraq and Syria; communism in South Yemen. Now we deal with Islamism.

The good news is that it, too, is failing. The bad news is that the underlying issues of governance which led to the failure of every other “ism” are still untreated, and if we are unable to help our friends in the area get to a better place on these issues, you’re going to see a successor to Islamic State. I don’t know who. I do know that it will not be good news for us.

There is a second inflection point that I’d hope we would have a chance to address today. The United States designed and led the post-World War II international order. That leadership changed, or that attitude to leadership changed over the last eight years. President Obama spoke of not being able to do everything. That’s certainly true. Too often I think that became an excuse for not doing much of anything.

Sadly, I think we’re seeing some continuity between the administrations, from President Obama to President Trump, on this issue. Are we going to lead? If not, who will? If not, what might the consequences be?

So I would urge, before we back out of that international order from post-World War II that we established and led, we need to think about the consequences.

I would say, finally, it’s hard to do any of this if you don’t have the people to do it. The budget cuts suggested by the Administration will do severe damage to both our diplomacy and our development. These things count. I would applaud the Congress, which has reacted to these proposed cuts. I think it’s very important that they not go forward or you’re going to see a weakened Foreign Service far into the future with some very significant consequences.

Lastly, truth in advertising here. I sit on the board of Mercy Corps International. We are heavily engaged on a number of issues. The one I’d like to highlight would be Syrian refugees. Mercy Corps doesn’t do resettlement. We focus on keeping refugees as close to their home country as we can. So we’re extremely active in Jordan, and in Lebanon in particular.

Why? That could be the long-term ultimate danger of this Syrian problem. We saw what happened with Palestinian refugees, where a spirit of hopelessness in refugee camps bred an entire generation of terrorism. We are working out there to try to get the resources and the programs that will get young Syrian refugees a sense that they do have a future. If that funding is cut, as has been proposed, humanitarian aid by 40 percent, ESF [Economic Support Fund] by almost 45 percent, we may be fueling the next wave years down the line of terror.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator INHOFE. Thank you, Ambassador Crocker.

Ambassador Edelman?

**STATEMENT OF AMBASSADOR ERIC S. EDELMAN, COUNSELOR,
CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND BUDGETARY ASSESSMENTS**

Ambassador EDELMAN. Thank you, Chairman Inhofe and Senator Reed, and members of the committee. It’s a privilege to be here.

While I don't normally want to speak for my Foreign Service colleagues on this panel, I think I do speak for all of us saying that I think all of us are thinking about Senator McCain today and wishing him very well in his recovery.

I agree with my colleague, Ryan Crocker, that we are at an important inflection point in the Middle East, and I think for that reason it is particularly important that the committee has scheduled this hearing, and I cannot tell you how proud I am to sit here in this company because I have enormous respect for my colleagues on this panel.

What I thought I would do is just talk about three things, really: why I think the region remains strategically important to the United States; the two large strategic challenges I think the United States faces in the region; and maybe some thoughts about what we might do about those.

First, I think there is a disposition in Washington that people talk about the Middle East today after a decade-and-a-half of difficult and seemingly inconclusive counter-insurgency operations in the region and growing United States energy, if not independence, at least self-sufficiency, to want to look at the region as something we ought to disengage from and try and limit our liability in the region.

But I would argue that, picking up a theme that Ambassador Crocker touched on, that as tempting as disengagement might be, I think it's important to bear in mind that it would reverse a strong bipartisan consensus over the past 60 years that the maintenance of a stable regional balance of power in the Middle East and the prevention of any external or regional power from dominating this area of the world is vital to the nation's security.

I think that's the case because, first of all, the energy resources of the region remain important to our allies in Europe and Asia, but also because global energy prices can affect our own economy. So even with our own self-sufficiency, were large segments of Middle Eastern oil to go offline because of a crisis in the region, the economic impact on the United States would be considerable.

But moreover, I think the problem is that, what Ken Pollack at AEI [American Enterprise Institute] says, "What happens in the Middle East does not stay in the Middle East." This region is a cauldron of poor governance and disaffection and, as a result, a petri dish for extremism that frequently manifests itself in terrorist attacks against our allies in the region, our allies in Europe, and ultimately the homeland here in the United States itself.

Since 2009, I think the United States has largely pursued a policy of retrenchment and limited liability which I think has had the unfortunate consequence of raising concerns about the U.S. role as a security guarantor in the region. I think that's been exacerbated by some of the consequences of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action [JCPOA] which has freed up resources for Tehran to use for its own purposes, both to procure weaponry for itself, but also to support its proxies in the region, pursuing an agenda of malign activity.

I agree with my colleague that there's been more continuity than at least I would like in the policies of the Trump Administration, which are couched in very different rhetoric but have broadly con-

tinued the previous administration's policies, perhaps reflecting the views that President Trump expressed during the campaign that the whole region, as he put it, was one big fat quagmire. But I do think it's something that requires some renewed attention and a new strategy.

I mentioned the twin challenges, and those I think were touched on by my colleagues, and it won't come as any surprise that the two challenges are Iran's quest for regional hegemony, and very much intertwined with that is the threat, the persistent threat of Sunni Islamic extremism, even after the demise of the Islamic State's physical caliphate. These two threats, I would stress, drive the region's many crises, and they also drive one another. So Iranian expansionism and activity and support for Shiite militias and proxies in Iraq and Syria also fuel Sunni extremism, and vice-versa.

I think the most urgent thing that the United States needs to do is to develop a strategy and a plan and a policy that reflect the new realities on the ground in Syria, where Iran is currently at its most vulnerable and potentially over-extended, and where the potential for renewed Sunni extremism is perhaps highest. ISIS has lost its self-declared caliphate, as Senator Reed noted, but the presence of Russian forces, Iranian forces, Iranian-sponsored Shiite militias, Hezbollah, et cetera, have allowed Tehran and Moscow to emerge for the moment as the arbiters of post-war Syria and have allowed Iran to consolidate at least the perception that they have a land bridge that links Tehran directly to Lebanon and to right on the Israeli and Jordanian borders.

Although there are few really appealing options at this point in Syria, I think we can and should exploit Iranian over-extension there. I welcome Secretary Mattis' recent statement that United States troops will remain in Syria to prevent the reemergence of ISIS. I think that's a necessary first step. But I think that will only be possible if we can help our Syrian allies, the Syrian Democratic Forces, hold strategic territory that's been liberated from ISIS control. I think that will help provide leverage for the United States in determining Syria's post-war fate, and also pose some obstacles and impose some costs on Iran.

I think in general we need to develop more leverage with Iran so we can impose costs more effectively, and I would make a few suggestions about what we might do in that regard. First, I think we ought to have public discussion about dusting off and updating our contingency plans for neutralizing Iran's nuclear facilities should Iran materially breach or withdraw from the JCPOA in response either to sanctions that this body chooses to impose or because of more vigorous United States enforcement of the agreement itself.

Just as it appears to be doing with North Korea, I think the Pentagon ought to be putting in place the capabilities to potentially shoot down future Iranian ballistic missile tests. Iran is developing a very large, very variegated ballistic missile capability. No country that has done that on the scale that Iran has done it has ever not ultimately become a nuclear weapons state.

I think it's equally important for the United States to cooperate very closely with our regional allies, and I'll defer any further dis-

cussion of that because I believe all of my colleagues agree with that and will want to talk about it.

I think we have to recognize that Russia has been so far an obstacle, not a partner, in building security in this region, and I think we would do well not to allow ourselves to be deluded into thinking that we can somehow easily split Russia and Iran from each other. For a lot of reasons that we could go into, I don't think that's likely to happen.

I think we also need to increase the internal pressures on the Iranian regime. This remains a very deeply unpopular regime. I fear that the JCPOA has actually mostly benefitted the hardliners in Iran because they're the ones who control the economic sectors that stand most to benefit from the sanctions relief. But it's also made them more dependent on a narrowing band of loyalists to maintain stability, as everyday Iranians feel very little benefit from the sanctions relief.

I think we can exploit all of this. A more aggressive political information campaign can amplify international investors' wariness of the Iranian market by highlighting the complexities of sanctions compliance, as well as the elites' corrupt business dealings and systematic human rights abuses.

Finally, I think we need to enforce the JCPOA to address Iran's serial under-compliance, which is what I would call it, with the agreement. I think this has begun to eat away at our credibility with Iran and raises the risks of continuing nibbling at the edges of this agreement, which when it expires will put Iran at the cusp of having a nuclear capability, as President Obama admitted at the time of the JCPOA's negotiation.

Through these steps, a lot of these are difficult steps to take, but I think we need to start taking them now because otherwise I'm afraid we will see further erosion in the U.S. position in the region.

With that, let me stop, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ambassador Edelman follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT BY THE HONORABLE ERIC EDELMAN

INTRODUCTION

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Reed, Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today on the need for a coherent strategy to address the manifold challenges confronting the United States in the Middle East. I have been intimately involved with the region throughout my career, including as Ambassador to Turkey and Under Secretary of Defense for Policy. I have continued working on this issue since retiring from government service in 2009 as counselor at CSBA, as the Roger Hertog Distinguished practitioner in residence at Johns Hopkins SAIS, and as co-chair of task forces sponsored by JINSA's Gemunder Center for Defense and Strategy and Bipartisan Policy Center. In these capacities, I have co-authored a range of reports laying out recommendations for U.S. strategy, but the views expressed here today are purely my own.¹

As on other issues, our country is currently roiled in debates over what role the United States should play in the Middle East, as well as what role the region should play in our broader strategic calculus. Although the Middle East remains increasingly complex and volatile, and as the threats emanating from the region continue

¹ I would like, however, to thank Jonathan Ruhe, Associate Director of the Gemunder Center at JINSA for his assistance in preparing this testimony and my colleagues on the JINSA, Bipartisan Policy Center, and Brookings task forces cited below for instructing me on the strategic issues that bedevil U.S. policy in the region. I would also like to thank my CSBA colleagues whose work on a Eurasian Defense Strategy for the United States is also reflected in this statement.

to threaten the U.S. and our allies both in the region and beyond, these debates are far from academic. I, therefore, applaud this committee for examining these matters and assembling today's panel of distinguished Foreign Service colleagues who have wrestled with the most intractable elements of the problems we face in the Middle East.

THE MIDDLE EAST STILL MATTERS

It has become a cliché to say that the American public is “war-weary” and supports diminished engagement with the world. There is certainly empirical evidence for that proposition. According to poll data from the Pew Center, in the run-up to last year's election, Americans wanted the new president to prioritize domestic over foreign policy by a nationwide margin of four to one, as compared to an equal split only a decade prior.² Fifteen years and counting of difficult and seemingly inconclusive counterinsurgency (COIN) and stabilization operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, plus America's growing energy self-sufficiency, have fed the growing sense that the United States must bring the “endless wars” in the Middle East to a conclusion. This perception of public pressure has led the United States to attempt to limit its liability in the region by drawing down the U.S. military presence and extricating ourselves from the region's seemingly endless problems.

However tempting a strategy of disengagement might be, we should bear in mind that it would reverse a strong bipartisan consensus over the past 60 years that the maintenance of a stable regional balance and prevention of any external or regional power from dominating the Middle East is vital to the nation's security. After World War II, the Middle East, along with Europe and Asia, was seen as one of the vital theaters in which the Cold War confrontation with Soviet power would play out. United States policymakers have considered access to the region's energy resources vital for United States allies in Europe, and ultimately for the United States itself. Moreover, the region's strategic location—linking Europe and Asia—made it particularly important from a geopolitical point of view.

By the late 1960s, the United States assumed de facto responsibility as the outside guarantor of regional security. The British relinquished their commitments east of Suez, culminating in the Carter Doctrine, which explicitly threatened the use of United States military force to prevent “any outside force” from dominating the Persian Gulf. At the time, this was correctly understood as a response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the possibility that the USSR would attempt to take advantage of the upheaval in revolutionary Iran to extend its dominion in the region. As a practical matter, the United States also made clear over the years that hegemony by a regional power was equally antithetical to the U.S. national interest. It was for that reason that the United States went to war to liberate Kuwait in 1991 and pursued a policy of “dual containment” against both Iraq's and Iran's ambitions to dominate the region.³

Since 2009 the United States has pursued a policy of retrenchment and limited liability in the region that has raised questions about its role as the Middle East's security guarantor. This was first made clear during the Obama Administration, which expressed through policy statements its desire to unburden America of the region altogether and “pivot” to East Asia. As a result, the United States withdrew from Iraq at the end of 2011, it failed to uphold its own red line against Assad's use of chemical weapons in Syria in 2013, and President Obama expressed a desire for Saudi Arabia and Iran to “share the neighborhood and institute some sort of cold peace.”⁴

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on Iran's nuclear program removed some limits on Iran's power projection capabilities by freeing up resources that Tehran subsequently redirected to its weapons programs and support for proxies. The agreement was seen by many Sunni Arab allies in the region as undermining United States pledges to constrain Tehran's revisionist ambitions in the region.⁵ President Trump's policies in the region to this point, although couched in very different rhetoric, have broadly continued the policies of his predecessor, per-

²“Public Uncertain, Divided Over America's Place in the World,” Pew Research Center, May 5, 2016; and Richard Wike, “Where Americans and Europeans Agree, Disagree on Foreign Policy,” *Fact Tank*, Pew Research Center, June 14, 2016.

³For an in-depth examination of the historical United States role in the Middle East, see Eric S. Edelman and Whitney Morgan McNamara, *Contain, Degrade, and Defeat: A Defense Strategy for a Troubled Middle East* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, March 15, 2017), pp. 3–19.

⁴Jeffrey Goldberg, “The Obama Doctrine,” *The Atlantic*, April 2016.

⁵“Strategy to Restore U.S. Leverage Against Iran,” JINSA Gemunder Center Iran Task Force, July 2017, p. 20.

haps reflecting the views of the Middle East he put forth during the campaign. He called it “one big, fat quagmire” and welcomed Russian intervention in Syria. Whether or not he will put into place a different strategy remains an open question.⁶

Notwithstanding the region’s difficulties and an understandable desire to disengage, the geostrategic and economic factors that made the Middle East so important to our national security in the past are just as potent today. First, despite rising U.S. energy production and prospective self-sufficiency, real or even potential disruptions to the flow of oil anywhere would have serious negative effects on our economy. This is especially true of the Middle East, which contains half of global proven oil reserves, accounts for one-third of oil production and exports, and is home to three of the world’s four biggest oil transit chokepoints. Moreover, U.S. allies remain vulnerable to disruptions in the flow of oil.⁷

Second, due to globalization and the region’s critical location, instability there still reverberates outward through Europe, Africa, East Asia, and even the American homeland.⁸ This depends very little on our direct involvement in the region, as radical Islamists have made clear their grievances run much deeper than our footprint there.⁹ Indeed, ISIS only grew into a regional, then global, threat largely because of our diminishing presence and the security vacuum it created. At the same time, the Assad regime’s indiscriminate offensives against its own people have triggered massive refugee outflows that are exacerbating Europe’s already strained economic and social fabric and threatening to overwhelm the security institutions of some of our closest allies.

Third, the United States has strong incentives to support our regional allies both as a matter of our ideals and our interests. If we are seen to be abandoning our Gulf partners in the face of Iran’s aspirations to dominate the region, or if we walk back our red lines on Syria, how can we be trusted—by friends or by foes—to maintain our commitments elsewhere in the world like the Baltics, the Korean Peninsula, or the South China Sea?

ADDRESSING TWIN CHALLENGES

Today there are two primary, intertwined threats to U.S. interests in the Middle East, not counting the underlying absence of a real U.S. strategy to address them. First is Iran’s quest for regional hegemony through increasingly overt interventions in neighboring conflicts, support for terrorist proxies, and its continuing pursuit of weapons capabilities like ballistic missiles—capabilities that, in the long run, only make sense in the context of achieving a nuclear capability, which will be within reach when the terms of the JCPOA expire. The second is the persistence of Sunni Islamic extremism, even after the demise of the Islamic

State’s physical caliphate in Syria and Iraq. These two threats drive the region’s many crises, and also one another: Iranian expansion fuels Sunni extremism, and vice versa.¹⁰

These twin symbiotic challenges will only grow more dangerous over time if a security vacuum is created by an absence of U.S. leadership. American policymakers must rebuild what Dean Acheson called “situations of strength” by disrupting this destabilizing dynamic that threatens the entire region.¹¹

ADOPT A POST-ISIS STRATEGY FOR SYRIA AND IRAQ

Most urgently, the United States needs a plan reflecting the new realities on the ground in Syria, where Iran is currently the most vulnerable and the potential for renascent Sunni extremism is the highest. ISIS has lost its self-declared caliphate;

⁶“This Week’ Transcript: Donald Trump,” *ABC News*, October 14, 2015.

⁷*BP Statistical Review of World Energy*, 66th edition (London: BP, June 2017), pp. 13–24; and Energy Information Administration (EIA), *World Oil Transit Chokepoints* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Energy, July 25, 2017). See also Commission on Energy and Geopolitics, *Oil Security 2025: U.S. National Security Policy in an Era of Domestic Oil Abundance*, (Washington, DC: Securing America’s Future Energy [SAFE], 2014).

⁸For an analysis of the continued importance of the Middle East to the United States, see Edelman and McNamara, *Contain, Degrade, and Defeat*, pp. 22–23.

⁹“Seeking Stability at Sustainable Cost: Principles for a New U.S. Strategy in the Middle East,” Bipartisan Policy Center, April 2017, p. 5.

¹⁰“Seeking Stability at Sustainable Cost,” pp. 7–8.

¹¹For the importance of building up U.S. strength more broadly to secure U.S. national security, see Derek Chollet et al., *Building “Situations of Strength”: A National Security Strategy for the United States* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, February 2017). For the background on Acheson, see John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy*, revised and expanded edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 80–81.

at the same time, the Assad regime is trying to take back the entire country with significant assistance, and even direction, from Russia, Iran, Hezbollah, and other Iranian-sponsored foreign Shi'a militias. These gains threaten to entrench Tehran and Moscow as the arbiters of postwar Syria, consolidating Iran's control of a "land bridge" connecting it directly to Lebanon.¹² By placing the country even more firmly under what is sure to be seen as a Shiite thumb—one that has profoundly alienated Syria's Sunnis—this outcome would also fuel the grievances driving recruitment for "ISIS 2.0," not to mention the local al Qaeda affiliate Tahrir al-Sham and other jihadist groups still battling the regime in northwest Syria.¹³

While there are few appealing options in Syria, we can and should exploit Iran's overextension there to create the conditions for an acceptable outcome. Defense Secretary Mattis' recent statement that United States troops will remain in Syria to prevent the reemergence of ISIS is a necessary first step.¹⁴ As our JINSA Iran Task Force argued, Mattis' goal can only be accomplished if United States forces also help our surrogates on the ground—chiefly the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)—hold strategic territory liberated from ISIS.

This will provide vital leverage in determining Syria's postwar fate and pose serious obstacles to Iranian-backed forces reconquering the entire country, thus cementing their land bridge. It will also mitigate one of the greatest constraints on U.S. policy, which is simply the widespread belief in the region that the U.S. wants nothing more than to remove itself, and any leverage, as soon as ISIS is defeated.¹⁵

The conflict against ISIS has allowed Iran to strengthen its grip over neighboring Iraq as well. As in Syria, Iran's sway over Iraq's security and interior ministries threatens to alienate the country's Sunnis—Arab and Kurdish—much as former prime minister Nouri al-Maliki's purge of Sunnis contributed to ISIS running amok through Iraq in the first place. Iran's role in Iraq also gives it influence over a key producer in the global oil market, and its presence in Syria places it astride the strategic crossroads of the entire region.¹⁶

Because an uncontested Iranian presence in these two countries would give it a dangerous edge in its quest for Middle East supremacy, the United States would be misguided to try to offset Iran's gains here by pushing back in secondary theaters like Yemen. Thwarting Iran's ambition to upend the regional order requires blocking it from creating a chain of satellite states across the region's heartland. This should include helping craft some form of local Sunni Arab governance to preempt the reemergence of the kinds of sectarian and economic grievances that fostered ISIS. Indeed, the United States will need to promote credible, accountable and inclusive—if not always democratic—state and local political institutions in the region more broadly if it hopes to address the underlying permissive causes of Sunni extremism and Iranian expansion.¹⁷

DEVELOP CREDIBLE MILITARY LEVERAGE AGAINST IRAN

Limiting the spread of these twin challenges in Syria and Iraq is the most urgent, but perhaps most difficult, task in the Middle East confronting American policymakers. Tehran has made deep inroads in both countries; it also shares longstanding ties with both antedating the current situation.

As our JINSA Task Force argued, the United States must also develop leverage where it can impose costs most effectively and credibly on Iran's malign behaviors. Despite the JCPOA's sanctions relief windfall and the regular IRGC harassment of United States Navy vessels in the Persian Gulf, for now United States naval and air power in the theater outmatches Iran's. To begin, the Pentagon should announce it is updating contingency plans to neutralize Iran's nuclear facilities, should Iran materially breach or withdraw from the JCPOA in response to United States enforcement.

Just as it appears to be doing to counter North Korean threats, the Pentagon must develop credible capabilities in preparation for a possible shoot-down of future Iranian tests of nuclear-capable missiles.¹⁸ To this end, Congress should consider

¹²"Countering Iranian Expansion in Syria," JINSA Gemunder Center Iran Task Force, July 2017, p. 7.

¹³"Seeking Stability at Sustainable Cost," pp. 10–11.

¹⁴Jamie McIntyre and Travis Tritten, "Jim Mattis on Syria: 'We're not just going to walk away' after ISIS," *Washington Examiner*, November 14, 2017.

¹⁵Edelman and McNamara, *Contain, Degrade, and Defeat*, p. 66; and "Countering Iranian Expansion in Syria," pp. 12–13.

¹⁶"Seeking Stability at Sustainable Cost," p. 10.

¹⁷"Seeking Stability at Sustainable Cost," pp. 11–12, 15–16.

¹⁸David E. Sanger and William J. Broad, "Downing North Korean Missiles is Hard. So the U.S. Is Experimenting," *New York Times*, November 16, 2017.

requiring the Pentagon to forward-deploy part of our Aegis-equipped missile defense fleet to the Persian Gulf, as it already has in Europe and East Asia. United States Navy ships must also fully utilize rules of engagement to defend themselves and the Persian Gulf against Iran's continual violations of basic rules and norms at sea.¹⁹

It is equally important the United States cooperate more closely with its regional allies. Policymakers must foster genuine collective defense among its Gulf partners—led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates—that are taking it upon themselves, together, to push back against Iran. Formal United States military backing, as well as encouragement for sub rosa support from Israel, are crucial for directing these energies in concert against Iranian provocations—and to assuage their sense of insecurity and frustration with Tehran's increasingly outsized role in their backyard. We must work with these allies on robust multi-layered theater missile defenses and interoperable air and maritime defenses in the Persian Gulf.²⁰

Furthermore, the recent ten-year Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on United States defense assistance to Israel should be treated as the floor for cooperation, and the MoU's artificial caps on United States missile defense assistance to Israel must be removed. Not only do United States systems benefit directly from joint research and production with Israel, but Jordan and Egypt now effectively shelter under Israel's umbrella—the importance of which only increases with the IRGC and Hezbollah ensconced along the Golan Heights.

RECOGNIZE RUSSIA AS AN OBSTACLE, NOT A PARTNER

Russia has played no small part in enabling Iran and its proxies to establish a new front against Israel and Jordan in southwest Syria. Indeed, there is a prevalent misperception that Moscow and Tehran could be profitably divided through deft United States diplomacy. In reality, both Russia and Iran want to roll back United States influence even further in the region, and each depends on the other to help it do so—primarily in Syria, but also through deepening Russian diplomatic, economic and technical assistance for Iran's nuclear and conventional weapons programs. Benefitting as much as it does, Russia is unlikely to reduce its ties with Iran at anything approaching an acceptable cost to the United States. Nor is Moscow's approach to counterterrorism at all complementary to our own. On the contrary, Russia's indiscriminate bludgeoning of Syrian cities from the air destroyed the moderate opposition and gave further fuel to Sunni grievances.²¹

INCREASE INTERNAL PRESSURE AGAINST THE IRANIAN REGIME

Hardliners within Iran's regime are the main beneficiaries of the JCPOA, as the Supreme Leader and IRGC control the economic sectors standing to gain the most from sanctions relief. Yet this also makes them dependent on a narrowing band of loyalists to maintain stability, especially as everyday Iranians fail to feel the benefits of sanctions relief. For all the regime's bluster toward America, it still fears being removed from power in the same way that it seized power in 1979.

We should exploit these fears as an added form of leverage. A more aggressive political warfare campaign would amplify international investors' wariness of the Iranian market by highlighting the complexities of sanctions compliance, as well as the elite's corrupt business dealings and systemic human rights abuses. To this end, Congress and the administration should intensify "non-nuclear" sanctions on the regime and publicize to the Iranian populace exactly where the windfall from sanctions relief is going.²²

ENFORCE NUCLEAR RESTRICTIONS ON IRAN

The United States must also rebuild leverage to address Iran's serial under-compliance with the JCPOA. This has slowly eaten away at United States credibility in Tehran's eyes and raises the risks of Iran continuing to advance toward nuclear weapons capability. Precisely because the

JCPOA has been so disastrous, the United States must restore leverage over Iran before deciding the deal's fate. In addition to the measures already mentioned, this means imposing every restriction in the JCPOA and UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2231 regarding enrichment capacity, inspections, illicit procurement activities, and possible military dimensions of Iran's nuclear program. These concen-

¹⁹"Strategy to Restore U.S. Leverage Against Iran," pp. 21, 27.

²⁰"Seeking Stability at Sustainable Cost," p. 13; and "Strategy to Restore U.S. Leverage Against Iran," p. 28.

²¹"Seeking Stability at Sustainable Cost," pp. 13–15.

²²Edelman and McNamara, Contain, Degrade, and Defeat, p. 66; and "Strategy to Restore U.S. Leverage Against Iran," pp. 24–25, 29.

tric pressures offer the best prospects to force Tehran ultimately back to the negotiating table under circumstances far more favorable to the United States and its allies.²³

Though these steps are many, we must take the first ones now to prevent the further erosion of our stabilizing presence and leadership role in the Middle East. I thank you, Mr. Chairman, for my time, and I look forward to the Committee's questions.

Senator INHOFE. Thank you for a very good statement, Ambassador Edelman.

We have a quorum right now, so we're going to go and make sure to take care of some business that must be taken care of.

Since a quorum is now present, I ask the committee to consider a list of 137 pending military nominations. All of these nominations have been before the committee the required length of time.

Is there a motion in favor of the report, this list of 137 pending military nominations?

[The information referred to follows:]

MILITARY NOMINATIONS PENDING WITH THE SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE WHICH ARE PROPOSED FOR THE COMMITTEE'S CONSIDERATION ON DECEMBER 14, 2017.

1. MG Anthony J. Cotton, USAF to be lieutenant general and Commander, and President, Air University (Reference No. 1113)
2. In the Army there is 1 appointment to the grade of major (Jennifer A. Mahoney) (Reference No. 1142)
3. In the Army there are 2 appointments to the grade of major (list begins with Yon T. Chung) (Reference No. 1143)
4. Col. Sharon A. Shaffer, USAF to be brigadier general (Reference No. 1220)
5. Col. Robert J. Marks, USAF to be brigadier general (Reference No. 1224)
6. In the Air Force there are 35 appointments to the grade of brigadier general (list begins with Ronald G. Allen, Jr.) (Reference No. 1228)
7. In the Navy there are 50 appointments to the grade of lieutenant commander (list begins with William L. Arnest) (Reference No. 1245)
8. MG Christopher G. Cavoli, USA to be lieutenant general and Commanding General, United States Army Europe (Reference No. 1263)
9. LTG Stephen J. Townsend, USA to be general and Commanding General, United States Army Training and Doctrine Command (Reference No. 1264)
10. In the Army Reserve there are 2 appointments to the grade of colonel (list begins with Nathele J. Anderson) (Reference No. 1265)
11. In the Army Reserve there are 2 appointments to the grade of colonel (list begins with Thomas W. Green) (Reference No. 1266)
12. In the Army there is 1 appointment to the grade of colonel (Adam R. Liberman) (Reference No. 1267)
13. In the Army Reserve there is 1 appointment to the grade of colonel (Michael E. Steelman) (Reference No. 1268)
14. In the Army there is 1 appointment to the grade of major (Gerald D. Gangaram) (Reference No. 1269)
15. In the Army there is 1 appointment to the grade of major (Brian R. Johnson) (Reference No. 1270)
16. In the Army there are 18 appointments to the grade of colonel (list begins with Scott T. Ayers) (Reference No. 1271)
17. In the Army Reserve there is 1 appointment to the grade of colonel (Peter J. Armstrong) (Reference No. 1272)
18. In the Army there is 1 appointment to the grade of colonel (Ali S. Zaza) (Reference No. 1273)
19. In the Army there is 1 appointment to the grade of major (Phillip T. Buckler) (Reference No. 1274)
20. In the Army there is 1 appointment to the grade of lieutenant colonel (Vernice K. Favor-Williams) (Reference No. 1275)

²³ "Strategy to Restore U.S. Leverage Against Iran," pp. 26–32.

21. RADM Nancy A. Norton, USN to be vice admiral and Director, Defense Information Systems Agency/Commander, Joint Forces Headquarters-Department of Defense Information Network (Reference No. 1281)
22. RADM Richard A. Brown, USN to be vice admiral and Commander, Naval Surface Forces/Commander, Naval Surface Force, United States Pacific Fleet (Reference No. 1282)
23. In the Air Force there is 1 appointment to the grade of major (Arianne R. Morrison) (Reference No. 1296)
24. In the Air Force there is 1 appointment to the grade of major (Richard A. Hanrahan) (Reference No. 1297)
25. In the Air Force there are 2 appointments to the grade of major (list begins with Aleck A. Brown) (Reference No. 1298)
26. In the Army there is 1 appointment to the grade of major (Heather M. Lee) (Reference No. 1300)
27. In the Navy there is 1 appointment to the grade of captain (Sharif H. Calfee) (Reference No. 1301)
28. Col. Mitchel Neurock, USAFR to be brigadier general (Reference No. 1314)
29. In the Air Force Reserve there are 5 appointments to the grade of major general (list begins with Hubert C. Hegtvædt) (Reference No. 1315)

TOTAL: 137

Senator REED. So moved.

Senator INHOFE. Is there a second?

Senator FISCHER. Second.

Senator INHOFE. All in favor, say aye?

[Chorus of ayes.]

Senator INHOFE. The motion carries.

Ambassador Jeffrey?

We do business pretty fast when we have to.

**STATEMENT OF AMBASSADOR JAMES F. JEFFREY, PHILIP
SOLODZ DISTINGUISHED FELLOW, WASHINGTON INSTITUTE
FOR NEAR EAST POLICY**

Ambassador JEFFREY. That was impressive, Senator.

Mr. Chairman Inhofe, Ranking Member Reed, members of the committee, I thank you for having us here. It's a particular honor to have a panel of fellow Foreign Service officers appearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee. Thank you for honoring the service of all of our corps around the world.

I also want to associate with Ambassador Edelman's comments about Senator McCain.

It's a problem when one is a witness before this committee on this subject when you're the third person to go given that there is a great deal of agreement on the broad problem and to some degree the broad elements of a strategy.

As you've already heard, we're dealing with a dual threat. Right now, I think for several reasons, Iran is the bigger of those dual threats, and I think this Administration in its October 13th statement has agreed with that.

The reason is partially because, for the moment, the biggest threat emanating from the Sunni Islamic extremism, ISIS, has been at least conventionally defeated. But secondly, there is a real relationship between Iran's activities and Sunni Islamic extremism.

When I left Iraq in June of 2012, what became ISIS, al Qaeda in Iraq under al Baghdadi, was little more than a terrorist band in West Mosul. Two years later, it was controlling a third of Syria and Iraq, 9 million people, with an army of 35,000—not entirely, because governance is always, as Ryan Crocker said, a huge issue. But bad governance was promulgated, encouraged, and exacerbated

by Iran's decisions and the decisions of people who were being advised and supported by Iran, Maliki in Iraq and, of course, Assad in Syria. This back and forth—there are 20 to 25 million Sunni Arabs between Baghdad and Damascus. Currently, they're not being ruled by Sunni Arab leaders. They're being ruled by people who, in the case of Syria, take orders from Iran, in the case of Iraq may or may not fall under Iran's influence. If those people are not protected by the international system that we've talked about here, they're going to turn again to terrorist forces, and we'll have this same problem all over again.

Given the general, I think, consensus on this, then the question is, including why it is important that Ambassador Edelman talked about, what to do about it. But before we get to what to do about it, or at least my view is, let's take a look at why haven't we figured this out.

While I have a lot of problems with the Obama Administration's actions on Iran, I certainly don't think he wanted to turn the region over to Iran, yet Iran has been advancing. While this Administration has a very tough rhetorical position against Iran, it has done very little on the ground in the first nine or ten months to stop further Iranian successes, and we've got a series of them in the last several months, largely in reaction to mistakes by our allies.

So why is it so hard? Several reasons. First of all, look at how Iran operates. It doesn't challenge conventionally like Saddam Hussein did, but rather it infiltrates other countries, playing off of bad governance, failed states, ungoverned areas, terrorist groups either they support or they use as an excuse to go in. They have people who know the region very well. They have a long-term strategy. It is all organized and supports each other—Lebanon, Yemen, Syria, Iraq, tomorrow Bahrain and Afghanistan.

This requires a comprehensive response throughout the region with both us and our allies, because we're not going to do this with hundreds of thousands of troops. That gets to the problems with our allies, as we've seen in the last few months with the Turks—pick the subject—Massoud Barzani and the independence announcement; the Saudis—again, pick the issue—Yemen, Hariri, or Qatar. They're all trying to contain Iran and deal with the terrorist threat in the region, but they're all doing it in an uncoordinated way that, more likely than not, advances Iran's objectives rather than contains them.

We need to get hold of this, and we won't do so until we have a comprehensive plan to deal with Iran and we've convinced them that we are in the lead and we know what we're doing. We're not there yet.

Secondly, anything we do to contain Iran, to push back, will bring with it great risks to us and to people in the region. Look at the 1980s and early 1990s when we faced four threats, from Soviets in Afghanistan, Iranians in Southern Iraq, Iranians in the Gulf, and Saddam in Kuwait. The kind of decisions we had to take and the chaos we deliberately created for the good end of containing these people was quite significant, and we have to be prepared.

There's nothing easy about this. If this was easy, the U.S. Government in the last 15 years would have done better. It's very hard. We clearly cannot ignore the area. That's the lesson of 9/11. We clearly can't go in with hundreds of thousands of troops for a long time. That's the lesson of Iraq and Afghanistan. So we have to do economy-of-force, light-footprint operations with our allies.

That will produce new Benghazis and new Nigers. I hate to say it. We've all been out there in the field. We know that sooner or later people make mistakes. We have to be able to move on and not melt down when these things happen because this is the right way to approach it.

Finally, on Iran, again, I agree with Ambassador Edelman. Syria and also Iraq and our presence in these areas is very, very important. That is the central front in stopping Iran. That will be very difficult because it requires keeping our troops on and dealing with what will be unquestionably deliberate Iranian threats to our people. How will we respond? In the past, we have not responded in a way that deters Iran from going after us, in part because we have kept the Iranian homeland free from any retaliatory threats or action.

On the JCPOA, as one who supported essentially the President's position publicly before he took it on decertifying, I would have to say cast it in doubt, do attrition warfare against the bad things in it, but if you want to contain Iran in the area, do not walk away from that thing. It's the best thing from an Iran standpoint that we could do to break up the coalition against it.

I'll stop there, Mr. Chairman, and turn it over to my colleague and friend, Stu Jones.

[The prepared statement of Ambassador Jeffrey follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR (RET.) JAMES F. JEFFREY

INSTABILITY GREATER THAN ANYTIME SINCE 1979

Events over the past three months in the Middle East, from Kirkuk to Syria, Beirut to Sanaa, from Iranian surrogate missile strikes against key Saudi and Emirati targets, to Israel's increasingly dramatic attacks against Hezbollah and Iran in Syria, form a pattern, illustrating the breath of regional crises, Iran's facility in benefiting from them, and the absence of a guiding United States strategy that can mobilize our considerable diplomatic, military and economic assets.

Since this committee last met on the issue of the Middle East, the region has seen momentous events. The United States has led an international coalition to success in the conventional war against ISIS in Iraq and Syria. Meanwhile, Iran, aided by Russia, has turned the tide in the Syrian civil war decisively in favor of the criminal Assad Regime. Finally, President Trump announced a new Iran policy October 13.

Yet the region is less secure, and the United States-led regional security order more endangered, than any time since 1979. The reason is that while one threat, Sunni Islamic terror, has been temporarily defeated in Syria and Iraq, and contained elsewhere, the more strategic threat, Iran, is growing rapidly, to some degree abetted by Russia. These two threats are organically linked; Iran benefits from ungoverned territories overrun by Islamic terrorists, from Yemen to Syria, and justifies its aggression as 'counter-terrorism.' Meanwhile, when America fails to contain Iran, Sunni populations embrace groups like ISIS and al Qaeda for self-protection.

President Trump's October 13 policy announcement on Iran, despite much mention of the Iran JCPOA nuclear deal, wisely set the first American priority as countering Iran's destabilizing activity throughout the region. Along with the President's commitment to a Palestinian-Israeli accord, and the fight against al Qaeda, Taliban and ISIS terrorists throughout the region, we have the outlines of a new regional policy, built on our success against ISIS, based on local partners, diplomatic mobilization and limited but decisive military power. Yet so far that policy has not spelled out how, specifically, we will contain Iran, nor reassured our regional partners.

But Iran, enabled by Russia, does have a detailed plan for the region; the Prime Minister Hariri fiasco in Lebanon, death of former Lebanese President Saleh, missile attacks on Riyadh, threats to Israel out of Syria and Lebanon, and the crushing of the Iraqi Kurdish independence effort, all bear Iran's fingerprints directly or indirectly. Absent a detailed game plan made-in-Washington, and successes implementing it, our partners are "winging it" in uncoordinated ways which Iran then exploits to further expand its gains. The risk is great that one or another such incident will explode into a regional conflict, if we do not quickly coordinate with our partners and explain our plan to contain Iran.

REGION'S IMPORTANCE, AND U.S. ASSETS

Any United States plan has to start with basics—the importance of the region to the security and well-being of Eurasia, a core United States goal since 1917. The Middle East is an essential unifying component of Eurasia, the source of many of the world's conflicts since 1947, and a key element in the United States-led global security system. Failure to resolve conflicts there affects our domestic security and allies' very stability, as we have seen with terrorist attacks on our homeland and Western Europe, destabilizing refugee flows out of Syria, and WMD threats. In addition, the region's energy supplies still remain critical for global economic health.

With the demise of ISIS, the main threat to the United States-led order is clearly Iran. But Iran's threat is, in Henry Kissinger's words, both as a state—pressing its hegemonic ambitions, and as a revolutionary, theocratic cause. This latter dimension stimulates the other great regional threat—Sunni extremist violence. I was witness to the rise of ISIS from a minor al Qaeda band in Mosul in 2012 to a major regional force by 2014 due to the oppression of Sunni Arabs by Iranian surrogates, Maliki in Iraq, and Assad in Syria. While ISIS is now largely defeated in the Levant, we risk a repeat of 2012–2014.

Any U.S. plan can draw on significant assets. Most of the states in the region are our security partners, with a huge conventional superiority, along with CENTCOM, over Iran, even with Russian support. The vast majority of oil exports from the region come from United States partners. Iran despite its claims as an Islamic revolutionary force can mobilize local allies mainly from the Shiite Muslim 15% of the region's population, and in some places such as Iraq many Shiite are uneasy at Iranian encroachment. By supporting the genocidal Assad regime including its chemical weapons use, and provoking massive refugee flows into, and terrorist attacks on, Syria's neighbors and Europe, Iran and Russia have lost any moral argument.

IMMEDIATE ACTIONS

Any United States plan should start by analyzing Iran's strategy. That strategy, to avoid responsibility and retaliation while advancing its cause in states where governance is weak, focuses on local surrogates, more loyal to Teheran than to their own countries. It also exploits instability, confident that the United States, European allies and even some in the region prefer short-term stability to effective countering of Iran's exploitation of weak governments and conflicts. The United States thus needs to build up the region's nation states and react quickly to governance failures that provoke terrorism and open the door to Iranian intervention.

Any detailed policy on Iran also should answer six questions: 1. What are the basic goals of the policy; 2. What to do now with the central front, Iraq and Syria; 3. How to mobilize allies; 4. What is the Role of JCPOA; 5. What response when Iran strikes back; 6. Whether and how to communicate with Teheran. My suggestions on each follow:

1. The United States should neither strive for regime change nor portray the Iranian challenge in Shiite-Sunni terms. Either approach will force Iran to mobilize even more, undercut potential partners including Turkey and Europe, and allow Russia to champion Teheran and Shiite Muslims. Rather, emphasis should be on rolling back Iran's malignant efforts to undermine and ultimately capture states.
2. The two key fronts are Iraq and Syria, which should be considered, as Iran does, as one theater, but with different approaches. In Iraq we have a relatively friendly government with Prime Minister Abadi, deep ties with much of the population, and considerable anti-Iranian sentiment including among some Iraqi Shiite clerics. The United States should lead the international effort to integrate Iraq back into the regional and global community, including with reconstruction and energy sector assistance. The United States should also press for a continued United States military training presence, to prevent a resurgence of ISIS and ensure Iraq is not dependent on Iran for military

support. The goal should not be Iraq as a Middle Eastern West Berlin, which is not feasible, but rather a Finland, which does not allow either Iran or the United States to project power out of it. The Iraqi government, egged on by Iran, should not be permitted to 'cherry pick' relations with us, enjoying our economic and diplomatic support while acquiescing in Iran's subversion and military moves.

In Syria, Secretary's Mattis' announcement that United States troops would stay on, to counter a possible return of ISIS, build up local counter-terrorism allies, and contribute to the Geneva process, is important. The United States cannot dictate events in Syria, but by its presence can contest Iran's (and Russia's) freedom of action. Aside from United States enclaves and local allies in the north and south, United States allies Israel and Turkey also operate militarily in Syria, and have a similar core goal of containing Iran, although differences on tactics, particularly with Turkey, are formidable. UN Security Council Resolution 2254 gives the United States and the region a legal justification for a say in any Syrian internal political organization, given the horrific impact of the Syrian civil war not only on the Syrian people but the region. Syria also desperately needs reconstruction, and this gives the United States and its European allies leverage with Syria and its supporters. Pulling all these assets together to contain Iran in Syria is a dynamic, uncertain endeavor, but far less risky than abandoning Syria once again.

3. Various regional partners and European allies are concerned about Iran, but absent a common United States led plan their responses have been ill-coordinated and contradictory. Clarity on United States plans and goals and particularly success against Iran will help mobilize allies, but the United States must discipline the system and overwatch partners constantly. The price they pay for U.S. leadership has to be coordination with Washington before acting.
4. Absent compelling evidence that the international community as in 2012 will rally behind the U.S. to impose draconian oil sanctions on Iran, the United States should not pull out of the JCPOA. United States sanctions without international cooperation would have little impact on Iran, but would give Iran an excuse under JCPOA article 36 to violate some of its commitments and thus move closer to a nuclear weapons breakout, while the world blames the U.S. The President's policy of keeping the agreement in limbo, criticizing its flaws, especially missile activity and the sunset clauses, and discouraging business deals with Iran, is sensible.
5. Bitter experience over decades with Iran demonstrates it responds violently when challenged, but in ways that make its responsibility unclear. The United States needs to know, and communicate, how it will respond, including the possibility of retaliation directly against Iran, if it wants to deter Iranian attacks.
6. Opposing a foe does not exclude communicating with it. But until the United States is clear on its own plans, has won partners' trust, and scored successes, communication with Iran should be limited to signaling red lines and deconflicting as in the Gulf. Eventually however the United States would need to clarify to Iran what United States goals are.

It is not too late for the U.S. to lead a return to regional stability and relative calm, but mistakes by successive administrations and the region's own weakness have contributed to a dangerous situation. The United States should ensure that everything it does in the region discourages, not encourages, Iran. That has not always been the case.

Senator INHOFE. Very good, Ambassador Jeffrey. Thank you.
Ambassador Jones?

**STATEMENT OF AMBASSADOR STUART E. JONES, VICE
PRESIDENT, THE COHEN GROUP**

Ambassador JONES. Thank you.

Senator INHOFE. Use your mic, please.

Ambassador JONES. Thank you, Chairman Inhofe, Ranking Member Reed. It's an honor to be here before you, and it's a distinct honor to be here with such distinguished colleagues.

I'm also thinking of Chairman McCain today and wishing him a speedy recovery.

Chairman Inhofe, as you said, last week Prime Minister Abadi announced the defeat of ISIS in Iraq, and I had the privilege to work closely with Prime Minister Abadi during my time in Iraq, and he's been tireless in his service to his nation and a reliable partner for the United States. He deserves our commendation for leading Iraq through a difficult three-year struggle and for reaching this watershed moment.

The fight against ISIS has been the organizing principle for our Middle East policy for the past three years, and we've known that the day would come when ISIS would be defeated, at least as a military opponent, and we would need to reassess policy priorities to build on this success.

Today, Iraq enjoys unprecedented low levels of violence, and Prime Minister Abadi is seen by Sunni and Shiite alike as a unifying force. Continued oil production growth and improvements in the oil export infrastructure, stabilization of oil prices, and support from the World Bank and the IMF have enabled the Iraqis to contemplate a prosperous economic future. Iraq will, of course, however, continue to face significant challenges.

As my colleagues have said, I think one of the main challenges will be the malign interference of Iran, its neighbor with a 1,400-kilometer border. While ISIS' terrorist ground forces are defeated, we know that extremists will go underground and continue to terrorize Iraq's innocent civilians, especially in urban areas such as Baghdad. The Iraqi security forces will need our continued assistance to combat this threat, and the government of Iraq has invited a limited number of United States forces to remain to provide training and other support to assist them in their efforts to combat extremism. Helping Iraq's counter-terrorism service reconstitute to face this new challenge is a mission that United States forces are uniquely positioned to accomplish.

So as I said, with the ISIS threat destroyed, malign Iranian interference is now the primary security challenge facing the region. Iran's activities threaten the security of our strongest ally in the region, Israel, but also threaten Jordan, a crucial partner, where I had the privilege to serve, as well as our Gulf partners.

Iranian interference has posed a challenge to Iraqi stability for some time, and it is now at its highest levels. Prime Minister Abadi has committed to integrating the popular mobilization forces, some with close ties to the Iran Quds Force, into the national security forces, with the requirement that they leave their political baggage behind them. This will be a huge task, and he will need our support for this.

The United States Administration is developing a strategy to push back and contain Iran throughout the entire region. This pushback needs to be a whole-of-government approach. In Iraq in particular, we need to go beyond the security support and remind the Iraqi public of the full benefit of the strategic framework agreement with the United States, which two of my co-panelists played an instrumental role in drafting.

Iraq has a large youth population, and from my time there I can say that Iraqi youth yearn for United States technology, United

States investment, United States training and education. General Electric Power Up program, which was initiated during my time in Iraq, has provided thousands of megawatts of needed electricity but also introduced cutting-edge technology, created hundreds of high-paying jobs, and afforded training that will transform those young workers' lives.

Likewise at this moment, U.S. energy firms are developing proposals to assist Iraq in capturing flared gas. The comprehensive solution to this problem, which Prime Minister Abadi has prioritized for 2018, would not only address an environmental calamity but also restore billions of dollars to the Iraqi economy in a short period of time.

For these measures to succeed, however, we must ensure that United States export promotion agencies are fully operational and targeted at the problem set in the Middle East, much as they were in the Bush Administration.

To his credit, Prime Minister Abadi has also launched a war on corruption. The public response to this announcement has been positive, and a war on corruption will be a blessing for United States-Iraqi Strategic Framework Agreement because the intrinsic value of the U.S. partnership becomes clearer on a fair and transparent playing field.

In our pushback against Iran, we should also continue to foster Iraq's ties to its other neighbors. Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Jubeir's visit to Baghdad in February, encouraged by Secretary Tillerson, was a game changer. Since then we have seen numerous high-level visits back and forth, and road and air links opened, the latter for the first time since 1990. The next step should be to encourage further progress on expanding and securing the highway between Amman and Baghdad.

Finally, the September referendum on Kurdish independence has had disastrous consequences for the Kurds and for the cooperation that had emerged between Baghdad and Erbil during the Mosul campaign. Although we opposed the referendum, we should now support restored cooperation between Erbil and Baghdad. It is often said that the Kurds provide the essential third leg to the Iraqi stool. Following the referendum, Prime Minister Abadi did what was needed, but now he's in a position to work towards reconciliation, and this rift needs to be repaired ahead of the 2018 elections in May so that the Kurds will participate fully in national politics.

So again, thank you for allowing me to join this distinguished group and to be before you today.

[The prepared statement of Ambassador Jones follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR STUART JONES

Chairman McCain, Ranking Member Reed,

First let me thank you for this invitation to testify before this Committee today. While we have spent a significant amount of time together it's the first time I have testified before this Committee and I am honored for the opportunity and I am equally humbled to be seated with this distinguished panel.

As we all heard, last week Iraqi Prime Minister Abadi announced the defeat of ISIS in Iraq. I had the privilege to work closely with the Prime Minister during my time in Baghdad. He has been tireless in service to his nation and a reliable partner for the United States. He deserves our commendation for leading Iraq through a difficult three-year struggle and reaching this watershed moment.

This victory was achieved by the Iraqi Armed Forces, but would not have been possible without the essential support of the Combined Joint Task Force for Iraq. We should also recognize the extraordinary military leadership of CJTF Commanders, LTG James Terry, LTG Sean MacFarland, LTG Steve Townsend and now LTG Paul Funk.

Again, I had the honor to work with all of these exceptional military leaders and their teams. They have done far more than defeat ISIS. Through their train and equip mission, they have restored the confidence of the Iraqi security forces; saved countless lives from the barbaric predations of ISIS; and facilitated the return of more than 2.7 million displaced persons to their homes.

The fight against ISIS has been the organizing principle for our Middle East policy for the past three years. We have known that the day would come when ISIS would be defeated and we would need to reassess policy priorities to build on this success. We are now at that point and the President must decide what United States foreign policy in the Middle East will look like going forward.

Today Iraq enjoys unprecedented low levels of violence and Prime Minister Abadi is seen by Sunni and Shi'a alike as a unifying force. Continued oil production, growth and improvements in the oil export infrastructure; stabilization of oil prices and support from the World Bank and the IMF have enabled the Iraqis to contemplate a prosperous economic future. Iraq will, however, continue to face enormous challenges.

While ISIS, the terrorist ground force, is defeated we know that extremists will go underground and continue to terrorize Iraq's innocent civilians, especially in urban areas such as Baghdad. The Iraqi Security Forces will need our continued assistance to combat this threat.

The Government of Iraq has invited a limited number of United States forces to remain to provide training and other support to assist them in their efforts to combat extremism. Helping Iraq's Counter

Terrorism Service reconstitute to face this new challenge is a mission that United States forces are uniquely positioned to accomplish.

With the ISIS threat destroyed, malign Iranian interference, is now the primary security challenge facing the region. Iran's activities threaten the security of our strongest ally in the region, Israel, but also threaten Jordan, a crucial partner where I had the privilege to serve—as well as our Gulf partners.

Iranian interference has posed a challenge to Iraqi stability for some time and it is now at its highest levels. Prime Minister Abadi has committed to integrating the Popular Mobilization Forces, some with close ties to the Iranian Qods Force, into the national security forces, with the requirement that they leave their political baggage behind them. This will be a huge task and he will need our support.

The United States Administration is developing a strategy to push back and contain Iran throughout the entire region. This pushback needs to be a whole of government approach. In Iraq, in particular, we need to go beyond security support and remind the Iraqi public of the full benefit of their Strategic Framework Agreement with the United States.

Iraq has a large youth population. From my time there I can say that Iraqi youth yearn for United States technology, United States investment, United States training and education. The General Electric Power Up program, which was initiated during my time in Iraq, has provided thousands of Megawatts of needed electricity, but also introduced cutting edge technology, created hundreds of high paying jobs and afforded training that will transform those young workers' lives forever.

Likewise, at this moment, United States energy firms are developing proposals to assist Iraq in capturing its flared gas. A comprehensive solution to this problem—which Prime Minister Abadi has prioritized for 2018—would not only address an environmental calamity but also restore billions of dollars to the Iraqi economy in a short period of time. For these measures to fully succeed, however, we must ensure that United States export promotion agencies are fully operational and targeted at the problem set in the Middle East.

To his credit, PM Abadi has also launched a 'war' on corruption. The public response to his announcements has been positive. A war on corruption will be a blessing for the United States Iraqi Strategic Framework Agreement because the intrinsic value of the United States partnership becomes clearer on a fair and transparent playing field.

In our pushback against Iran, we should also continue to help foster Iraq's ties to its other neighbors. Saudi Foreign Minister Jubeir's visit to Baghdad in February, encouraged by Secretary Tillerson, was a game changer. Since then we have seen numerous high level visits back and forth and road and air links opened, the latter for the first time since 1990. The next step should be to encourage further progress on expanding and securing the highway between Amman and Baghdad.

Finally, the September referendum on Kurdish independence has had disastrous consequences for the Kurds and for the cooperation that had emerged between Baghdad and Erbil during the

Mosul campaign. Although we opposed the referendum, we should now support restored cooperation between Erbil and Baghdad. It is often said in Iraq that the Kurds provide the needed third leg of the Iraqi stool.

Following the referendum, Prime Minister Abadi did what was needed. Now he is in a position to work towards reconciliation. This rift needs to be repaired ahead of the May 2018 elections, so that the Kurds may participate fully in national politics.

Chairman McCain, Ranking Member Reed, I want to thank you, again for this opportunity and for your consistent leadership on these issues. I always value your insight and I look forward to taking your questions.

Senator INHOFE. Thank you very much, Ambassador Jones, for that statement.

I was thinking, Ambassador Crocker—we'll go with five-minute rounds. Is that all right with you? Try to get as many people. It's a well-attended meeting here.

When you made the statement, we agree with you on some of the cuts that are going to be necessary. But on this committee, we sit and we look at a situation where only a third of our Army ground brigades can fight, we see only a fourth of our Army air brigades. We're very sensitive, and we've heard over and over again that the Marines use the F-18, and the F-18s right now, 62 percent of them won't fly, so we have to do things.

When there's a drawback on Armed Services, this happens, it's real. So somewhere, it has to give. I want to ask for a response, but that's one of the things that concerns all of us here.

Let me just put this in context. We're all alarmed to see how Iranian influence has grown in Iraq since our premature withdrawal in 2011. Despite losing more than 4,500 American lives and spending more than \$1 trillion in Iraq since 2003, our hasty, I felt, ill-thought-out troop withdrawal opened the door to Iran to accomplish its strategic objectives in Iraq. Iran has been remarkably successful in pursuing those objectives.

It's not like we didn't see this coming. I and a lot of members of this committee warned for years that the hasty withdrawal from Iraq would lead to an increase of Iranian influence there. I had one of my own quotes down here. It was August of 2010 when I made the statement, "Obama's rush for an expedited withdrawal of troops from Iraq would endanger Israel and the entire Middle East and would empower Iran."

So what I'd like to do is kind of—you've all touched on this, but a response from all four of you. Many people are unaware of the extent of the influence of Iran that it now holds in Iraq. Can each of you broadly lay out Iran's strategic objectives there and discuss how Iran has advanced them since the United States withdrawal?

Let's start with you, Ambassador Crocker.

Ambassador CROCKER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Nature abhors a vacuum, and the Middle East abhors it even more. When I left in 2009, violence in Iraq was at an absolute minimum. The Iranians were on their back feet. Prime Minister al Maliki had moved against one of their clients, principal clients in Iraq, the Sadr movement, engaged them militarily from Basra all the way up to Sadr City, and with significant help from us, he beat them back.

However, you do not end a war by withdrawing your troops from the battlefield. You simply cede the space to adversaries who have more commitment and more patience, and that's exactly what we've seen, I think, in Iraq with the presence now of a number of Shiite militia backed by Iran, well-armed, looking for a new mission after Islamic State. They take their orders from Tehran, not from Baghdad.

A fundamental understanding we should all have is Iran's history and its geopolitical assessments. The Shah of Iran projected force beyond his borders with conventional forces. It was the Shah's Iran that seized the three islands from United Arab Emirates. It was the Shah's Iran that sent basically a mechanized infantry brigade into Oman to help the Sultan put down a rebellion.

The Islamic Republic is doing the same thing with different means, using militias rather than regular forces under the command of Qasem Soleimani, and we now see a resurgent Iran in the region. The only way I can see us gaining back some of that ground is not by confronting Iran directly in Iraq. Sadly, they have more instruments there than we do. But it would be by a sustained engagement with the Iraqi government, with Prime Minister Abadi, to do everything we can to build up a stronger central authority. It will be a long-term commitment. It does not take forces. It does take consistent, focused, White House-led political engagement. I hope we see that.

Senator INHOFE. Ambassador Edelman, any comments on this?

Ambassador EDELMAN. Yes. I would speak, Chairman Inhofe, with some trepidation sitting here on a panel of three former ambassadors to Iraq about Iranian strategic goals there. So let me, if you'll permit me, to kind of open the aperture a little more broadly and speak more broadly about it.

One of the things I think we neglect at our peril is to recognize that Iran remains a revolutionary regime committed to the spread of its particular ideology and emerging as a leader in the Muslim world despite the fact that it represents a minority, a current minority sect inside world Islam, and that I think explains a lot of its behavior. I mean, for years, since the revolution in 1979, a lot of us have been waiting for the Thermidorian reaction that would allow Iran to pursue a Shiite political ideology in one country, to make an analogy from the history of the Russian revolution, and it hasn't happened.

It remains committed, at least the leadership and the regime remains committed, if not the public, to this particular ideology, and that drives them to use these proxy forces that they started using in the early 1980s, almost immediately after the revolution, in Lebanon and now in Iraq and Syria and elsewhere, to extend their influence to allow them to become the dominant force in the region.

Senator INHOFE. Okay. Well, thank you. My time has expired, but if we do a second round, I'd like to have you both, Ambassador Jeffrey and Ambassador Jones, to be thinking about this.

Senator Reed?

Senator REED. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Just a quick follow-on. Ambassador Crocker, you were there on the ground in 2008, I believe, when President Bush signed an agreement with Maliki to withdraw all our forces in 2011. Was

your advice to do that, or is that just—why did we do that? I mean, we agreed to take all our troops out; correct?

Ambassador CROCKER. Thank you, Senator Reed. Yes, I was the senior negotiator for that agreement, as well as its accompanying security agreement. We pushed hard for more open-ended language. Prime Minister Maliki told me an important point. He said, “Look, we’re going to need you here for years, if not decades, but that has to work in an Iraqi context. Iraqis, including those opposed to the Prime Minister, need to hear, at that particular point, that there would be a finite limit on how long the U.S. would stay. Put the emotions aside, then let’s get working on negotiating the longer-term agreement.”

That didn’t happen, and I would suggest that it didn’t happen because, again, President Obama had run on, in part, a position to end the wars of the previous administration. Again, as I said and as we’ve seen, you don’t end wars just by withdrawing your forces. There was a clear understanding at the time that our presence would be enduring.

Senator REED. But there has always been a question about whether Maliki was entirely sincere about his wishes or his ability to deliver it, given the Iranian influence. That was a factor, I think, all through that period.

Ambassador JEFFREY. Senator Reed, could I add something to that?

Senator REED. Please.

Ambassador JEFFREY. I was, unfortunately, the guy who lost the American troop presence, as you all know, in 2011.

Senator REED. Right.

Ambassador JEFFREY. First of all, it’s very difficult to keep American ground troops in any Middle Eastern country—the only place where we have a significant number is Kuwait; think of Kuwait and why that’s so—over time when there isn’t an emergency situation. Also, we needed a status of forces agreement. Maliki was willing in 2011 to sign a piece of paper. He or his foreign minister, I guess, signed it in 2014 when we came back in because it was an emergency situation and we didn’t worry too much about that. But in a peacetime situation, it’s very hard to put troops on the ground in a place like that without the guarantees.

But the relevance of that experience in 2011 for what we’re doing now in Syria, in Iraq and elsewhere, I would say is as follows. We had—and Stu Jones was my deputy as we prepared for this, so I’ll share the blame with you. We had a Plan B that we were going to cheat, with Maliki’s acknowledgement, on all of the keeping troops out. We had Black SOF [Special Operations Forces], White SOF, we had drones, we had all kinds of things. I don’t want to get into them in great detail. It was a very big package, including a \$14 billion FMS [Foreign Military Sales] program. We had bases all over the country that were disguised bases that the U.S. military was running.

What happened was the Obama Administration—not just the President, who knew about this plan, but the entire bureaucracy—loses interest in that kind of deployment because you don’t have a four-star General Petraeus, General Austin to talk to the Secretary of Defense and directly to the President. You don’t have the focus

of the American people once they're gone. Maliki kept coming back and asking for this little military asset or that little military asset. We were his security blanket. We left, so he had to turn to the Iranians.

The second big mistake was in 2014, when we responded to the fall of Mosul by taking a decision to send at least some troops back in and support the effort, but we did not do air strikes for three months, until finally in the north we had the problem with the Kurds in Sinjar Mountain and the folks up there. We did that for, I think, good reason. We were trying to squeeze Maliki out.

But the fact that the Iranians did come to the aid of the Iraqis and we did not played a huge role in the position they're in today.

So again, they take advantage, as you've heard from my colleagues, of mistakes that we or our local allies make.

Senator REED. My time is running out. This is a topic of not just Iraq but of other areas. So I hope if there's a second round we can shift focus to Syria and you can explain to me our policy there. Thank you.

Senator INHOFE. Thank you.

Senator Fischer?

Senator FISCHER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ambassador Crocker, this week Putin claimed victory in Syria. He announced the supposed withdrawal of Russian troops from the country. He presided over the signing of a \$21 billion plan to build a nuclear power plant in Egypt, and he condemned United States efforts in the region as destabilizing. I think it's pretty clear that the Russians are working to increase their role in the Middle East and undermine United States interests.

But looking outside of Syria, where do you think their next targets in this effort are going to be?

Ambassador CROCKER. That's a great question, Senator. I am not an expert on Russian affairs, but that won't stop me from pontificating.

[Laughter.]

Ambassador CROCKER. My colleagues who are will straighten that out, I'm sure, for the record.

The Russians under Putin played a bad hand brilliantly. The Russians intervened in Syria not because they saw an opportunity but because they saw a very real threat that they were going to lose basically their only asset in the region, Bashar al Assad. They teamed up with the Iranians, and we see where they got. Incidentally, at the same time he declared victory and said he was bringing the troops home, he also announced that there would be a permanent Russian presence both in Tartus, the navy base, and at an air base in Syria, so they're not going away. They will continue to use Syria as a point of leverage for their broader strategies in the region.

I don't know if they have a next move planned in the region. I think it's entirely possible that for the time being, they're going to sit where they are because it's a good place.

Senator FISCHER. Do you think—I'm going to interrupt you for a minute. Do you think they're just looking for opportunities, then, that there is no comprehensive plan?

Ambassador CROCKER. Well, what I believe is that, again, like Iran, you need to know the history and how the world looks from that other capital. In the case of Russia, no, it's not a return to the Soviet Union, clearly, but it looks a little bit like the return of the Russian Empire. I think that is the motivating spirit for President Putin, and I would expect to see their next move not in the Middle East, probably in Europe.

Senator FISCHER. Thank you.

Yes?

Ambassador EDELMAN. Senator Fischer, if I might, because I think I'm the only one up here who had a misspent youth in Soviet affairs, I think you touched on the right thing. I think President Putin is actually a tactical virtuoso, but I don't think he has a real strategic plan here.

But what I think you see in Syria is the Russians taking advantage of a long-time client relationship. They look for opportunities. I think the fact that they're looking at Egypt, another place where they've had a long-term relationship, suggests they may be looking for opportunities there, and they're certainly looking for opportunities in Turkey, where Ambassador Jeffrey and I both served, which is not a place that they've traditionally had strong relations but where they see the worsening United States-Turkish relationship as opening an opportunity for them.

Senator FISCHER. Any other comments?

[No response.]

Senator FISCHER. I would ask all four of you what do you believe the United States' response should be?

Ambassador Jones?

Ambassador JONES. Thank you. I would just say that in Syria we do have to cooperate with the Russians. I think that the de-confliction zones that have been established in southwestern Syria are having an effect, and I think they create a positive model for future cooperation. I also think that this holds the Russians to a certain standard of behavior and also highlights their responsibility to deliver the performance of their Iranian and Hezbollah partners inside of Syria. I think we need to also hold them to their commitment to the Geneva process in Syria.

So by taking this leadership role in Syria, I think the Russians have obligated themselves, and we need to hold them to those obligations in a very public fashion.

I think in the rest of the region, I think we need to continue to show the value proposition of the United States partnership. Russia doesn't bring anything to Egypt that Egypt really needs. Russia doesn't bring anything to Libya that Libya really needs. We will expect Putin to seek opportunities there for domestic fulfillment, but I think we need to show steadily our strategic partnership to these countries and show that we can offer solutions.

Senator FISCHER. How do we hold Russia to obligations when they violate arms treaties?

My time has expired. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator INHOFE. That's a good question.

Senator King?

Senator KING. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Edelman, a question for the record. You made a couple of assertions that are inconsistent with the information I've had as a member of this committee and the Intelligence Committee, and I'd like you to supply the evidence. One is that the JCPOA is "freeing up resources for other malign activities." My understanding is that may be true in a very minor way, but if you have evidence on that, I would appreciate having it. This is for the record, you don't need to respond now.

The second is you cited serial violations by the Iranians. That is also inconsistent with the information that I have. So I would like whatever data or evidence you have of that.

Finally on this point, I would ask if you believe that a nuclear armed Iran, in virtually the identical situation of North Korea today, would be a positive for the stability and strategic balance in the Middle East. That's a yes or no question.

Ambassador EDELMAN. No, I don't think it would be positive.

Senator KING. Thank you.

I'm astonished that none of the four of you mentioned in your discussions, which is a hearing on the Middle East, the President's recent decision about recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and moving our embassy. I don't see how you can ignore one of the most significant decisions in terms of the Middle East, and I wondered—I guess I'll start with you, Mr. Jones, Ambassador Jones. Given the fact that apparently we got nothing for that in terms of concessions by the Israelis on settlements or anything else, do you think that was a positive move in terms of stability in the Middle East?

Ambassador JONES. No, Senator, I don't. What I'm concerned about now, I think we've seen initial reactions to this. Frankly, the reaction has been a little bit more muted than many experts expected. But we'll also now start to see second- and third-order consequences, and this is going to have negative effects on governance inside of Jordan and Lebanon and other places which have large Palestinian populations. So I am concerned about King Abdullah in Jordan, who has made very clear his opposition to this, who I had the honor to serve with very closely. The Jordanians are concerned.

Senator KING. My understanding is that just this morning Turkey has announced the establishment of an embassy in the West Bank, recognizing the Palestinian state. I guess any of you—Mr. Jeffrey, is a two-state solution an important part of the peace process in the Middle East?

Ambassador JEFFREY. The two-state solution is a very important part of the situation between Israel and the Palestinians, and everybody who has looked at this, almost everybody who has looked at this has not been able to come up with an alternative given Israel's commitment to a democratic political system, given the demographics.

In terms of the President's decision, again, as I mentioned with the JCPOA, any action taken that makes Iran happy in the region is a mistake, and this made Iran happy, thus it's a mistake. If this is the biggest mistake this administration makes in the Middle East, it will be okay because I don't think the ramifications of it are all that strong because right now the region is focused primarily on Iran, and that includes most Arab states, and second-

arily on the terrorist threat, where Israel is extraordinarily effective with both Egypt and Jordan.

Senator KING. Isn't it more difficult, though, to achieve a two-state solution?

Ambassador JEFFREY. I think the two-state solution at the moment is moribund both from the standpoint of the Palestinians and from the standpoint of the current Israeli government. So I don't think we stopped something that otherwise would have given us a major win in the region. I mean, I've been through this, as have my colleagues, with the Annapolis Process in the Bush Administration, obviously with Obama's effort in the first term, Kerry's effort in the second term. We can go back to Clinton and Camp David, and again and again, we haven't gotten there. The region and our influence in it has continued.

Senator KING. I agree with your statement that we haven't gotten there, but nobody has come up with an alternative for solving this problem that would maintain Israel as a democratic Jewish state.

Ambassador JEFFREY. Exactly, and thus, it's on my list of to-do things, but it's not at the top of it.

Senator KING. Other thoughts on the issue of moving the capital? Ambassador Crocker?

Ambassador CROCKER. Senator, I think it's too early to tell what the significance is. The immediate reaction that we focused on, as Ambassador Jones said, was it's going to create an explosion of violence in the region. It didn't. The climate is not really right for that right now, for a lot of complex reasons. That doesn't mean it isn't going to have a long-term impact. I think it will, I just don't know what that will be. There are now voices in the Arab world saying, right, no more two-state solution, so let's push for a one-state solution in which all of the citizens of that state have equal rights under law, including the right to serve in the military.

Again, I don't know where this is going, but it's going to play out over a longer term and I fear not in any positive way.

Senator KING. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator INHOFE. Senator Cotton?

Senator COTTON. Thank you, gentlemen, for your appearance on this incredibly distinguished panel. I respect and thank you all for your service to our country abroad and in many places that don't appear on top tourist destinations.

I'll follow up on both points that Senator King made. Ambassador Edelman, I'll give you a yes-or-no question as well. Would it be a positive development for the Middle East for Iran to develop nuclear weapons in 8 to 13 years when the key provisions of the JCPOA expire, when its economy has grown stronger because sanctions are lifted, when its conventional military is stronger because the conventional arms embargo is lifted in 2020? That can also be a yes-or-no question.

Ambassador EDELMAN. No, it would not be positive.

Senator COTTON. Thank you.

On the point about Jerusalem being the capital of Israel, was it an irresponsible and rash decision of this Senate to vote in July,

90 to nothing, that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel? Anyone can take it.

Ambassador JONES. Senator Cotton, I think it's just a recognition of fact. I'm a frequent critic of the Trump Administration, but the President was acting in conformance with the law that he was asked to implement. My one criticism would be I think the step would have been more usefully made in the context of a broader plan or proposal as opposed to a one-off. But otherwise——

Senator COTTON. Thank you.

I want to turn now to Syria, and I'll start with Ambassador Crocker, since I believe you are the only member of the panel who served in Damascus, although everybody obviously has been impacted by their service, and then we can get other reactions after Ambassador Crocker responds.

What are the best steps the United States could take at this point, not looking retroactively and assigning blame or credit for any action anyone took in 2011 to this point, to reduce Iranian influence inside of Syria? I'd like your advice in terms of best practical steps. I don't think anyone believes the American people will support a large-scale conventional military deployment to Syria, but what are the best practical steps that we could take that could have the durable support of the American people to minimize Iranian influence inside of Syria?

Ambassador CROCKER. Thank you, Senator, and thank you for your service.

There are several things. The most critical thing in my view is pull together a policy. What we're seeing now with the Syrian Democratic Forces that were so closely allied with us in the campaign against ISIS, they don't know what we're going to do next, so they're in touch with everybody. I mean, they're talking to the Assad regime, they're talking to Tehran, they're talking to Hezbollah, because they know we haven't set a policy, and they've got to live there.

So we're into a period now, I think, that's pretty dangerous, where all the actors are going to posture and take positions as though we're not there because we may not be. So that's one.

Second, we need to be present diplomatically and politically. The Turks, the Iranians, and the Russians started this Astana process as a counterpoint to Geneva; we weren't even in the room. Now I guess we're there as an observer. We're the United States of America. If we're part of a process, we don't stand on the sidelines and watch. So I would hope that we would get a grip on the political processes that are in play, Astana and Geneva, and use those as a forum to start serious thinking on the way ahead, which is going to be complicated and messy, but also to assert that the United States is there for a reason. These are our security interests, and we are going to be very much a part of that process. We are not going to leave it to our adversaries, such as Iran.

Senator COTTON. Gentlemen, any other thoughts on that one?

Ambassador JEFFREY. Very quickly, Senator, we have a lot of assets in Syria even though it doesn't look that way. We and the Turks between us hold about a third of the country and have a lot of local allies even though we're not coordinated with the Turks, but that's a question of diplomacy. The Israelis operate militarily

throughout Syria in the air. That's another factor. We have a diplomatic entree with U.N. Resolution 2254, which means it's all of our business how Syria is organized. We can leverage the possibility of reconstruction as a means to try to force a wedge between the Russians, as Ambassador Jones was talking about, and the Syrians and the Iranians, because ultimately their interests are different. But we have to keep not just diplomacy but a military presence there, and that means working with Turkey, the Kurds in Iraq, and the Iraqi government so that we can physically get in and out, because we need entree to that region.

Senator COTTON. Well, my time is expired, but thank you again for your appearances here. I know some of you have already failed at retirement. To the extent you ever fail again and want to come back into government service, I bet there are a bunch of senators on this committee and elsewhere in the building that would be happy to vote to confirm you to another position in the United States Government.

Senator INHOFE. Senator Warren?

Senator WARREN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

As we've been talking about over the past few months, local forces trained and supported by the United States-led coalition have retaken former ISIS strongholds in Mosul and Raqqa, and I want to follow up on Senator Cotton's question, but I want to broaden the inquiry just a little bit to ask more about what happens after we defeat ISIS on the battlefield.

It seems like right now we have challenges both with Russia and Iranian forces and their proxies, and that they're moving very quickly to take advantage of conditions on the ground in order to reach their own regional objectives.

So, let me just start with you, Ambassador Jones. What can the United States do to push back against Russian and Iranian assertiveness and try to set the conditions for a political settlement that is in our interests and in the interests of the Syrian people?

Ambassador JONES. Thank you, Senator Warren. I think most importantly what all of us have touched on is the need for a regional approach to containing and pushing back on Iranian malign interference throughout the region, and this is, of course, going on in Syria, but it's going on in Iraq and Yemen and Bahrain and in, of course, Lebanon. So I think we need an overall regional strategy to help to contain Iran, and then I think that will bring into higher relief the malign interference that it's carrying out inside of Syria.

I think it's going to be very difficult given our limited tools to affect Iranian conduct in Syria without weakening its other activities.

I'd also say that, in regards to Russia, as I mentioned earlier, there's nothing very attractive about Russian involvement in Syria. The Russians saved the Bashar regime in 2015. They haven't really known what to do with it since, as Ambassador Crocker said. This was to preserve their own status. But they are interested in cooperating with the United States for a variety of reasons. So reaching agreement on the de-confliction zone in southwestern Syria I think does represent a positive model for cooperation with the Russians, and also for holding the Russians accountable.

Senator Fischer asked how do you hold them accountable. Well, I think we have to hold them accountable by highlighting when they don't meet their commitments, such as if they are not able to facilitate or to force the withdrawal of Hezbollah and Iranian forces from some of those areas in southwestern Syria, then that should be highlighted and that should be called out.

Finally, I think we need to continue to press for the Geneva process, as Ambassador Crocker said. We need to be engaged diplomatically, using all of our international tools.

Sorry to go on for so long.

Senator WARREN. No, no, I appreciate it, and I appreciate the focus on Russia. It's been Russian support for Assad that's prolonged this crisis. Of course, the Iranians continue to destabilize Syria. It seems to me the Trump Administration needs a clear strategy for ending the violence, for holding Assad accountable, and for making sure that the other actors on the ground don't take advantage of what happens in this post-ISIS world.

There's one other thing I'd like to ask about before I'm out of time this morning, and that is about the ongoing Saudi military operation against the Houthis in Yemen and the resulting humanitarian crisis there. The situation on the ground in Yemen continues to deteriorate. Outside experts estimate that more than 10,000 Yemenis have been killed in the fighting and millions more are at risk from famine and disease.

In June, 47 senators voted to disapprove the sale of United States precision-guided missiles to Saudi Arabia, an expression of deep concern that many of us have had about this humanitarian crisis.

So let me just ask here how the United States can use our leverage with the Saudis to limit civilian casualties and to ensure that Yemeni civilians receive food and medicine and other basic human necessities.

Ambassador Jones, Ambassador Crocker, who would like to answer this one? Go ahead.

Ambassador JONES. Very quickly, I will say that I think that we should be concerned about humanitarian conditions and civilian casualties in Yemen. I think the Saudis can do better. I think the solution is to work more closely with the Saudis. I think that conditioning assistance will be counterproductive and risks extending the conflict there. I think we're at a crucial moment now with the new schism between the Houthis and the General People's Congress, the party of Ali Abdullah Salah, the recently killed former president.

I think this is a time to push for a political resolution. But to do that, the Houthis have to see a very credible military threat, and they should not see any uncertainty from us in our support for the Saudi coalition.

Senator WARREN. I hear your point on this. I just want to push a little bit. I think this conflict and humanitarian crisis in Yemen is breeding more extremism in the region and continues to put us more at risk, and there's no doubt that Iran should stop making this conflict worse. But let's not forget that Saudi Arabia is the one receiving weapons from us and receiving support from us, and I

think we need to hold our partners to a higher standard here. We have a crisis on our hands that's getting out of control.

I'm out of time, so I'll stop there, Mr. Chairman. But I think we've really got to raise the bar on this one. Thank you.

Senator INHOFE. Senator Ernst?

Senator ERNST. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, gentlemen, as well, for your committed service to the great United States of America.

Ambassador Edelman, I'm going to start with you in regards to Turkey, and then if anybody else would like to hop in as well, I'd appreciate that.

Sir, you once served as the Ambassador to Turkey. Thank you for doing that. But I think you would agree with me that our relationship with Turkey has changed drastically since your time in service in that country. Erdogan continues to consolidate power, he suppresses his opposition, and he has really cozied up to Russia. This complicates our security cooperation as it pertains to NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] and our collaborative efforts within the Syrian Democratic Forces to defeat ISIS in Syria.

If you could, Ambassador, just simply, are you optimistic about the direction of United States-Turkey relations?

Ambassador EDELMAN. I'm not, and I invite my colleague, Jim Jeffrey, who served multiple tours in Turkey, including as ambassador, to add and subtract from what I say. But I'm not optimistic. I think the relationship is likely to get a little bit worse before it gets better. I think that's largely driven by President Erdogan's domestic calculations about what he needs to do to consolidate the personalistic presidential regime that he is trying to impose on Turkey in which he now has to face the electorate one more time for the presidency when his term comes up, and I think that's driving almost everything, and a lot of those calculations drive him to do things that make the relationship worse.

I also think that to some degree, while I obviously think it's a huge mistake for Turkey to procure S-400s and to cozy up to the Russians as they have, to be fair, some of that is a reflection of the vacuum that we have created which my colleagues have been talking about. I mean, we have let Russia and Iran become the arbiters of Syria's future. Syria sits right on Turkey's border. They're housing three million Syrian refugees on their territory, which has imposed enormous costs on Turkish society.

So, I mean, we bear a little bit of the blame here for this deterioration in relations, going back a number of years to the outbreak of the civil war in Syria back in 2011, Senator Ernst. But I don't think we can tolerate some of the behavior that our Turkish allies are showing, and in particular the use of American citizens and American Foreign Service national employees, in essence, as hostages to the desires of the Turkish government, their attempt to put bounties on the heads of former United States Government officials like Henri Barkey and Graham Fuller and Michael Rubin, people who they are accusing of being coup plotters, an outlandish charge. I mean, we really have to draw the line here and push back very hard on this.

Senator ERNST. Right. With that aspect, Ambassador, and Ambassador Jeffrey, I would appreciate your opinion as well, or your

thoughts on this matter, then what can we do as the United States to work with and change the current trajectory of Turkey?

Why don't we start with you, Ambassador Jeffrey?

Ambassador JEFFREY. Yes. I knew this question would come up, Senator, and because none of us want to be an apologist for Turkey because the things they do are toxic, but let me make a couple of general points.

We've talked about how we're going to deal with this region, and as Senator Cotton said, we don't want to put lots of ground troops in there. That means we have to rely on five countries—Israel, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Pakistan, and Egypt. We've already talked today about the problems with many of these countries. We wouldn't pick these allies if we were coming up with a different Middle East, but we have to deal with the Middle East we have.

They're crucial, and we can't even get to this region without them. This is from yesterday's Military Times: "Deployed to Incirlik Air Base, Turkey, the 74th Fighter Squadron has dealt punishing blows to ISIS fighters in support of United States-backed Kurdish fighters known as the Syrian Democratic Forces." That was yesterday. Those Syrian Democratic Forces are commanded and controlled by a PKK [Kurdistan Workers' Party] offshoot, as Ash Carter told this committee two years ago, that is dedicated to overthrowing Turkey. We're supporting that group because we need it against ISIS. Turkey complains, screams, does all these things against us, and every day those planes fly. That's the Middle East we have to deal with today. It's unpleasant, it's transactional, it's ugly, but we and Turkey have very similar strategic goals. Russia and Iran and, to some degree, Syria want to change the mix of the Middle East. We do not, Turkey does not, and at the end of the day we just have to push back, as Ambassador Edelman said, but don't cut off this relationship. It is crucial to us.

Senator ERNST. Very good. I appreciate it, gentlemen. My time has expired.

Senator INHOFE. Senator Shaheen?

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you all very much both for your service at the State Department, as well as for being here today.

Ambassador Crocker, you talked about the fact that we're not even at the table in the discussions in Syria right now, and I would argue that part of the problem there is that we have a State Department that is not functioning in the way that we would like it to because we have an administration that doesn't recognize the importance of diplomacy and the role of the State Department in foreign policy. I'm not even sure how much it recognizes the importance of foreign policy.

But I wonder, I'm going to ask you, Ambassador Jones, because you were most recently the State Department's top diplomat for the Middle East, I wonder if you could talk about what we could be doing to better enhance endeavors with our allies and partners in the Middle East through traditional diplomatic channels.

Ambassador JONES. I think that this administration actually has taken significant steps to improve relations with key partners in the Middle East. I do think that the Riyadh summit in June was a watershed moment when President Trump was able to convene

the Islamic world and make a very strong declaration both of respect for Islam and also a rejection of extremism. I think these kind of measures are significant and should be continued.

As I said in my remarks too, we have to make sure that we actuate these gestures that are being done at the very senior levels at the working levels, and we need to use all of our soft power tools in places like Iraq and Saudi and in the Gulf and in other parts of the Middle East, in Egypt certainly, to make clear the value proposition of the United States relationship, and that means business, that means technology, investment, and——

Senator SHAHEEN. Well, that certainly makes sense. I'm sorry to interrupt, and I appreciate what you're saying about the message that that sent to other Middle Eastern countries about how we view our relationship with Saudi Arabia and with Sunni countries. But I don't know, Ambassador Edelman, I think it may have been you who talked about the disconnect between our policy objectives and what we're seeing from some of our allies in the Middle East, and I wonder if you would connect what Ambassador Jones is saying to what we could do to be influencing Saudi Arabia's behavior so that it doesn't try and manipulate Lebanon, for example, so that it doesn't help create a famine in Yemen in a way that is not in anyone's interest. How can we encourage them to be on the same page in terms of strategic objectives?

Ambassador EDELMAN. Senator Shaheen, it's nice to see you again.

Senator SHAHEEN. Nice to see you.

Ambassador EDELMAN. I think it's important to go back to what I was saying in response to Senator Ernst's question about Turkey. A lot of the things that we see Turkey doing that we don't like are a function of their reaction to having to fend for themselves rather than rely on the security guarantees they get through NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] and from their traditional strong bilateral relationship with the United States.

In my opening statement I talked about some of the challenges that have been created in the region by the appearance that the United States was receding from the region and giving up its role in the region. I think when you create that kind of vacuum, I think what happens is people try to do it on their own. In the case of the Saudis, I think they're doing it on their own without a lot of experience of having done this. So it's not altogether surprising that they will do things in a way that we think makes things worse rather than better.

I think the most important thing we can do, and I think Ambassador Jones talked about this a little bit in his response to Senator Warren's question, is to make our allies understand that we are there for the long term, that we have their back, that we are going to be with them, but that we think maybe they want to adjust what they're doing a little bit. You get much more receptiveness to that kind of guidance, which Ryan Crocker excelled at in multiple posts in the region, if you've got a strong alliance basis on which to base it.

Senator SHAHEEN. Doesn't that speak, then, to a very robust diplomatic effort in the region?

Ambassador EDELMAN. Of course.

Senator SHAHEEN. While I appreciate the singular event in Saudi Arabia, the fact is we don't have an ongoing strategic response that connects what we're doing militarily and what we're doing diplomatically, that I can see, and that that, I think as all of you have laid out, is one of our challenges there. We don't have a long-term, consistent strategy for what we're doing in the region.

Ambassador JEFFREY. Very quickly, Iranian missiles and rockets in southern Lebanon and in northern Yemen are strategic existential threats to two of our key allies, Saudi Arabia and Lebanon. Ten thousand more dead civilians in the Middle East, in a region that's seen 1 million in the last 30 years, by my count, or a stable coalition government in Beirut are not going to deter the Saudis and the Israelis from acting against this threat. How they act against it, as Ambassador Edelman said, is where we should be more active.

Senator SHAHEEN. Well, I certainly agree with that. That's one of the reasons I've been a sponsor with other members of this committee of Hezbollah sanctions, so that we can put more pressure on them. But as you point out, it's got to be consistent.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator INHOFE. Senator Perdue?

Senator PERDUE. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to echo other comments today about the august group we have here. I've learned so much just sitting here the last hour from you gentlemen after spending a couple of years on Foreign Relations, so I hope you take this show on the road over there as often as you get asked.

Ambassador Jeffrey, I want to move this a little bit. I think not only is this a pivotal point in time, it seems to me we've got a couple of pivot points in the region geographically. The GCC [Gulf Cooperation Council] is having a crisis right now, and Qatar is right in the middle of that, and two of our allies really are creating a destabilizing influence I think right now when we need to be showing force against the Iran-Russia influence over there. We've got about 10,000 troops, including Central Command and our air assets, plus a full deployment of a full brigade's worth of armor sitting there. So it's a pivot point for Afghanistan and other points in the region.

Can you speak to us just briefly about your perception of what's this really about between Saudi Arabia and Qatar, and what should we be doing to influence two allies to cut it out and let's see if there's alignment that we can find here?

Ambassador JEFFREY. I first had to do an inventory of whether any of my colleagues had served in Qatar, in Saudi Arabia, so I could kick the thing. I think those are the only two places where Ryan Crocker hasn't served, but he probably has a view because he did well on Russia.

But anyway, it gets back to what all of us, but I think most eloquently Ambassador Edelman, has said. Our allies, left alone to deal with the Iranian threat, and secondarily the threat of Islamic extremism, because there's a Muslim Brotherhood element between Qatar and Saudi Arabia, and the Emirates as well, flail around and do things that are uncoordinated. They don't check with us enough in advance, and we wind up with a mess.

I think this administration, despite a couple of initial comments by President Trump, has taken a good position. I saw this at the security conference this last weekend out in the Gulf. They basically are, all in all, supporting Qatar. I would say it's 55/45, because we have great interests with the Saudis and the Emiratis. But they clearly made a mistake. Qatar is objectionable in many ways, just like, as I said and as we discussed at length, Turkey and Saudi Arabia and other places. But we can't be going at each other, scratching each other because of these secondary sins when the real sinning in the region is done by Islamic terrorists and Iran. So we have to get a better hold of our allies.

Senator PERDUE. What should we be doing with Qatar specifically in Saudi Arabia to keep Qatar from leaning back toward Iran, which it certainly looks like they are in a position to do?

Ambassador JEFFREY. They will to some degree because it starts with the Paz gas field. I mean, they're going to have a strong relationship with Iran because they share that critical gas field. The more we can get the Saudis and the Emiratis to roll back, the more the Qataris presumably will eventually find that they don't have to keep turning to the Iranians, the Russians, Turkey and others, and this feud eventually blows over. There was an earlier feud, I think 2014 or 2013, and it did blow over. This one looks uglier.

Senator PERDUE. Ambassador?

Ambassador EDELMAN. Might I just add something to my colleague's comments? This is more in the nature of a problem in search of a solution than a solution, but one of the problems I think we have with both Turkey and with Qatar is that they house very important United States military facilities. As a result of that, both of those governments have, I think, concluded that there is a limit to how much we will push them on certain things we don't like because of the desire to keep those facilities, which are very important facilities, available.

I think we need to look at more diversified and resilient basing in the region so we don't become hostage to this kind of behavior and we can push back a little bit more effectively when the Qataris do things we don't like. I have a certain amount of sympathy for the Saudi and Emirati position about the Qatari support for the Muslim Brotherhood in the region. They did a lot in the early days of the Syrian civil war to make things infinitely worse than they had to be.

So we have to figure out a solution to this ourselves so that we don't find ourselves being held back from pushing back on some of the things our allies do that we think are wrong.

Senator PERDUE. You bring up an interesting point from a strictly military point of view. We talked about it in here. After 17 years of war over there, I'm shocked at our support footprint. Incirlik is at risk. I just got back from a trip earlier this year to Pakistan and Afghanistan to see how we resupply that and what we have to do to do that. I mean, this is a very precarious footprint we have over there, and now Russia is at Latakia and Tartus, moving down in the Horn of Africa. China is in there now. So this is a key, key topic, I think, to support not only the diplomatic effort but also the military support for that too. It's a great point. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Senator INHOFE. Senator Peters?

Senator PETERS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to each of our very distinguished witnesses. It's been a fascinating discussion, and I appreciate your service and your willingness to impart some of your knowledge with us here today.

In Michigan, I'm very proud to represent a very large Arab-American, Muslim-American community that focuses on these issues quite a bit, given that that is their homeland. In addition to that, I have a very large and thriving population of religious minorities from the Middle East as well, particularly Chaldeans and Yazidis, and ISIS has been absolutely devastating. Their actions have been devastating to these ethnic communities and have really showed, I think, a unique brutality toward them and their historical homeland.

I supported legislation that declared the atrocities committed by ISIS against Christians, Yazidis, and other religious and ethnic minorities as war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. In March of 2016, then-Secretary of State Kerry declared ISIS was responsible for genocide against these groups in areas under their control.

As Ambassador Jones mentioned in his written testimony, ISIS can be expected to go underground and to continue to attempt to terrorize Iraqis in the months and years ahead. So I'm concerned that despite the military successes that we have seen against ISIS, members of these communities are still going to face violence and persecution. But I'd like to hear from each of you, based on your experience, if you could provide an update as to how you view this situation and your recommendations as to what we should be doing and should the United States be doing more.

I'll start at this end.

Ambassador CROCKER. Thank you, Senator. This is with respect to the religious minorities?

Senator PETERS. Religious minorities, correct.

Ambassador CROCKER. One of the lessons I learned a long time ago is beware of unintended consequences of major actions, and there is no action more major than a military intervention in someone else's country. You are setting in motion not third- and fourth-order consequences but 30th- and 40th-order consequences, as we are seeing to this day in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

With respect to the minorities, they were doing okay under Saddam because they posed no threat to him. I mean, he was an equal opportunity dictator and murderer, but by and large the minorities could live in Iraq. I frankly question how much longer we're going to see a significant Christian presence, particularly on the Plains of Nineveh.

I had a conversation a year ago that I will never forget with one of the patriarchs, and I won't go further in identifying him, who met with me in Europe with a prominent lay representative. The lay representative spoke first and said support us, make a clear declaration you will defend us, train us, arm us, so we can look after our local security, be an ally. The patriarch then said, please do none of those things. All you will do is paint a big bulls-eye on our backs to give the religious extremists grounds to say clients of America, and it will get even worse. So just don't do anything.

That was a very sad moment for me, because I think we are looking at literally an existential threat to the minority communities in Iraq, and also in Syria for those who didn't get out. I don't have an answer for that except to say be careful what you get into.

Senator PETERS. I appreciate that. Anyone else have a comment?

Ambassador EDELMAN. Senator Peters, I'd just say, first of all, I think we are witnessing an enormous tragedy in the region, which is in many places a likely loss of the various Christian and other heterodox minority communities, which is a shame for the region.

I would just point out that in the Turkish context there are significant minority issues as well with the Olavi population, and we have one issue in Turkey where Pastor Andrew Brunson, a Protestant missionary, is being held by the government on very preposterous charges of being a coup plotter. So this is very broad throughout the region. In that case you're dealing with a NATO ally, not even a country that's outside the ambit of our normal alliances.

Senator PETERS. But in terms of the Nineveh Plain, is there anything specifically we should be doing? We have two more ambassadors within the remaining time, which is limited.

Ambassador JONES. Thanks, Senator Peters. I think that we can be proud of our record on stabilization throughout Iraq, and I think continuing to invest in stabilization, which is an immediate, fast-action, low-cost process of restoring electricity, water, education to communities so that people return to their homes. That's probably the best thing that we can do for them.

I want to associate myself with all of Ambassador Crocker's remarks and also add that when we meet with these Christian leaders in Iraq, they say please don't make it so easy for our people to leave Iraq, because we're losing our communities here, and the more we lose our communities, the weaker we become. So we have to think, as Ambassador Crocker said, through second-, third-, and fourth-order consequences.

But the best thing we can do, I think, is help people return to their homes and help build up institutions in Iraq that will protect the rights of these individuals.

Senator PETERS. Thank you.

Senator INHOFE. Senator Rounds?

Senator ROUNDS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Gentlemen, first of all, let me just say thank you for your service to our country. What you do goes unnoticed in many cases, and yet it is so critical to our long-term successes in international diplomacy, which is much more desirable than international intervention with military force.

Let me go back to the JCPOA for just a moment. I want to just walk through the logic of where we're at today. The reality is, it's in place. The reality is that we have up-fronted with resources that were committed by the United States to Iran. Those have been received by them. Now the obligation to execute their portion of the contract, the JCPOA, is in place, and they have certain obligations that they have to respond to.

I question whether or not there is built into the JCPOA the appropriate penalties involved for their failure to do so, and I'd like to challenge, if I could, the thought process that I'm laying in front

of you that this is really a one-sided obligation forward. This is up to them as to whether or not they respond, and yet at the same time, since there is nothing more that we have to do with this in terms of any other obligation that we're committed to if they behave, if they behave, then the JCPOA has simply delayed the time period in which they will have nuclear capabilities.

On the other hand, if they do not, then simply the JCPOA has not worked, other than the fact that we have other allies who have supported this effort and who are also part of the international community who may or may not feel some obligation to condemn Iran when they do or if they do fail.

Would you, if I could ask each of you briefly, could you either correct my assumptions involved in the discussion or reaffirm what I'm suggesting?

Ambassador JEFFREY. Let me start, Senator. I was involved, as was Ambassador Edelman, in the Bush Administration, which took the basic decision not to use unilateral means, which is a euphemism for war, to deal with the Iranian problem, but to go to the P5+1. That was formed during the Bush Administration to negotiate internationally. When you go down that route with the IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency] and the non-proliferation treaty and the U.N. Security Council, you're going to get a marginal product because that's the nature of international affairs.

What we got was a marginal product. It also does the job for 10 years of keeping them a year away from having a nuclear capability if they adhere to it.

Your specific question was do we have tools if they don't adhere to it. The answer is absolutely. Article 36 allows any member, including Iran, by the way, if the others are not living up to their actions, to stop all or a part of the commitments made under the agreement. That would include our sanctions. That's article 36. There's a process you have to go through for about three months to try to convince the others and try to resolve it. But at the end of the day, you can unilaterally within the agreement stop doing things that you were supposed to do in it. Again, Iran can retaliate.

The second thing is you have the snap-back provisions of article 37 at the end of that process. We, as a state that has the veto in the U.N., it leads to a U.N. resolution essentially saying continue this agreement, and if you veto it, the agreement basically dies, or the U.N. aspects of it die, which is tantamount to killing it.

So there are very powerful tools that we do have within this ten-year period. But at the end of the ten years, as President Obama admitted, it's a different ball game, and we're going to have to figure out what we're going to do with that then.

Senator ROUNDS. Other thoughts?

Ambassador EDELMAN. Senator Rounds, I largely agree with you, and let me make just three points, some of which goes back to Senator King's question.

First, I think the JCPOA was inadequate in dealing with the past military dimensions of Iran's activity. The IAEA ended up closing the file on that without really getting to the bottom of all the issues that had been raised in the 2011, the November 2011 IAEA report, NxK I think it was, that outlined all the different problems that more than ten countries' intelligence services had

provided evidence to the IAEA about with regard to military activities. Without that as a baseline, it becomes very difficult to verify the agreement.

Secondly, the provisions of the JCPOA itself for inspections were far from the anytime/anyplace that was originally promised and which, for instance, were a very important part of verifying South Africa's abandonment of its nuclear program.

The third element is, I think, what I call the under-compliance which we've seen, which is the nibbling around the edges, which are activities Iran is engaged in which were then "solved" by side deals after the fact. So twice Iran—and this is in answer to Senator King's question—twice Iran exceeded the amount of heavy water it was allowed to produce. Once we solved it by buying it, once we allowed them to switch it out for Russian uranium. They missed other deadlines for amounts of low enriched uranium above certain percentages and certain amounts, which we then solved by, again, these side deals.

So there hasn't been a major violation. The IAEA has said that repeatedly. But there has been this pattern of nibbling around the edges, which I think is very dangerous because over time it conditions the Iranians to believe that they can engage in bigger violations and perhaps get away with it.

Senator ROUNDS. Thank you, and I apologize. My time has expired, but I most certainly appreciate all of your service, and thank you very much for your responses today. Thank you.

Senator INHOFE. Senator Blumenthal?

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

You are probably aware that on Monday, Turkey will meet with Russia to finalize a deal to purchase the Russian S-400 surface-to-air missile system. Saudi Arabia has also expressed an interest in this system. I'm concerned that this trend or that this kind of action may be part of a trend, a very troubling trend of our allies in the region turning toward Russia to invest in this kind of system. Among its other distinctions, it is incapable of integration, or at least not readily so, in the United States or NATO defenses.

My question to all of you—and I really appreciate your being here. Your insight and expertise is enormously valuable to us, as it has been while you were in service. What should we be doing to address this issue? If these systems are purchased and installed, what are the implications for our military and our diplomacy around the world?

Ambassador CROCKER. Well, as the person who knows least about Turkey, let me start. It's an important question, Senator, without doubt. I think, as you suggested, there are some real issues of the effect this will have on Turkey's defense capabilities. As you know, it's a Russian system. It's not compatible with Turkey's systems, which are our systems, and have been for the last 70-odd years.

But I do think we need to take a deep breath on this one. Turkey was a founding member of NATO precisely because of the Soviet Union. They have a history going back through the Ottoman Empire of confrontations between two great empires, theirs and the Russian Empire. So I think there are some natural limitations here.

I would say with respect to what we should do, obviously Turkey is doing a lot of things we don't like. They are a NATO partner in a region where we don't have a choice between democracy and autocracy. That's not on the table. It's the forces of order versus the forces of disorder. Turkey has always been a force of order. I think we, again, need to engage, if we could just get a few assistant secretaries confirmed, and ambassadors, and start going through the relationship, as happened under Ambassador Jeffrey and Ambassador Edelman. We need to get back to that point where, indeed, Turkey is a NATO ally.

Finally, I would just say one of the reasons we are where we are was the consistent refusal of the European Union to seriously entertain Turkey's bid for membership, good enough to fight and die for NATO but not good enough to join the gentleman's club of the EU [European Union]. The Turks are a proud people. They were embarrassed, I think, by that, and Erdogan seized on it.

So everybody needs to take a deep breath here. I think this is salvageable, but we kind of need to get on with it.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you.

Ambassador EDELMAN. Senator Blumenthal, I agree largely with what Ambassador Crocker said. First, again, a little bit of historical context to be fair to our Turkish allies. On a couple of occasions over the past decade and a half, when the issue of defending Turkey from ballistic missile threats came up, it was tough to get the NATO assets down to Turkey because of reluctance on the part of some of our allies who dispose of the assets and debates inside of NATO, and I think that's opened a question mark in Turkish minds about whether NATO will actually, at the end of the day, be there to defend them, to be fair to them.

Having said that, it's very clear that the S-400 is not compatible with NATO systems, as Ambassador Crocker said, and that was also true of a Chinese system that they were thinking about buying before the S-400 became available to them.

We do need, I think, to engage with them and remind them of what that actually means, both for broader NATO defense but also for Turkey's defense, because it means there are going to be a lot of early-warning assets that won't be available to them that will put them at some risk, and that does require an ambassador in place. We do have an Assistant Secretary for European Affairs, which is a good thing, a very capable one, as a matter of fact, but we need to get them engaged in this now rather than wait until it's too late.

I mean, one of my concerns about the lack of staffing in the Administration has been that, if we go back to something we discussed earlier in this hearing, which was the miscalculation of Massoud Barzani about the referendum in Kurdistan, I think the United States Government was very late to publicly get out there and express its opposition to this. Back in the good old days when giants walked the earth, and I'm talking about my colleagues to the left and right, we would have been engaged in this at a much earlier point in time and have had more time to manage the problem, I believe.

Ambassador JEFFREY. The entire NATO missile defense system focused on Iran that the Obama Administration put in following

the Bush Administration is based on NATO radars that then-Prime Minister Erdogan personally agreed to in 2009 or 2010.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you. My time has expired, so I apologize. I have a lot more questions on this, but whether or not giants ever walked the earth, I think we would settle for a few ordinary experienced human beings in those ambassadorships today. Men of your caliber would be even better, men and women of your caliber would be even better, but there is no ambassador to Turkey right now. There are no ambassadors in Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Somalia, certainly very critical roles that have to be filled, and the connection between our military strength and our diplomatic strength is inextricable, as you know, and unfortunately it's been ignored by this administration.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator INHOFE. Senator Kaine?

Senator Kaine. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks to all of you. I just would recommend to my colleagues—I apologize for being late today, but the Foreign Relations Committee had a closed briefing on the Administration's new counter-terrorism guideline proposal, which is the proposal for changing the Obama doctrine about the use of drones, and I think some on the committee have received that briefing. But I would encourage—because it really bears on this topic today, I would encourage everybody to try to get that briefing.

I had been following a little bit when I wasn't here the questions that were asked and, Ambassador Jones, you talked about the Kurdish referendum in your opening statement. But I would really like to have all of you address this issue, not just the referendum but working down the road with us on the Kurds. They have been wonderful partners. Their independence aspirations creates real challenges down the road for a unified Iraq.

They have been wonderful partners in Syria, but our work with the Kurds in Syria has been one of these agitation points, among others, with our relationship with Turkey as an ally.

What do you think the long-term policy of the United States should be vis-a-vis the Kurds in both Iraq and Syria?

Ambassador JONES. Well, I think in the first instance, as we agreed, the referendum has had negative effects for the Kurds. So we should focus our efforts now on reconciling between Erbil and Baghdad. I think many of us here are close and warm friends with Massoud Barzani. I still think that he is an outstanding leader in Kurdistan. But now the Kurds and Prime Minister Abadi need to find ways to return to the level of cooperation that they enjoyed in the lead-up to the Mosul campaign.

I'm frankly more troubled by the situation in northeastern Syria, although I think it was absolutely necessary to carry out the military cooperation we have. I think now we do need to take seriously the Turks' concerns about the rise of the YPG [People's Protection Units] there, and we need to make sure that our military presence there does not create a political monopoly for a political organization that is really hostile to U.S. values and ideology.

So I think my concern about the referendum in Iraq was that it wasn't well prepared, it wasn't coordinated with us, it wasn't coordinated with the Iranians, who do have a role, and it wasn't co-

ordinated with the Turks and with Baghdad. So I think that's the lesson, that if the Kurds want to move forward on this agenda, there needs to be much more deliberation and understanding between all of the parties in the region on how this should go forward.

Senator Kaine. Other comments?

Ambassador JEFFREY. The region, and that begins with Turkey, can—as I said, the Turks are allowing us to support the PKK offshoot Kurds in Syria every day—reluctantly, with a lot of bitching, but they do it.

The region, and Turkey in particular, can support autonomous Kurdish entities to one or another degree—and it varies because these are very different kinds of Kurds in the two countries, in Syria and Iraq—as long as it fits, as long as we're there, the Turks know why we're there, and the Turks' interests are taken care of, and these are not violations of the unity of those countries involved. In Syria, I'm less concerned. But with Iraq, Senator, that's 5 million barrels of oil produced on a good day. They don't have many good days with the OPEC [Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries] quota and such, but they can do that today if they needed to, and they can go up soon to seven or eight. That's getting into the Saudi Arabia category. That's a very important trump card, so to speak, in the Middle East, and we don't want to just break it up.

The timing was wrong, the idea was wrong, and what it has done is it has set the Kurds back terribly in terms of their ability to survive, because much of the oil they were exporting now is in central government hands. The Turks are still allowing them to export their own oil, but that's about half of what they were exporting before, 650,000 barrels.

So there is major political, security, and economic aspects of this, and they have gone in three months from one of the best good-news stories in the region to another basket case.

Senator Kaine. Mr. Chairman, my time is running out, but I know you're interested in this question too. Could I let the other two witnesses answer the question as well? Please? Thank you.

Ambassador EDELMAN. Senator Kaine, I'm not sure how much to add to what Ambassador Jones and Ambassador Jeffrey just said. We're wrestling here with a problem that is really, in a way, the last remnant of the Ottoman Empire, because the Kurds are the largest nationality in the world without a state, spread among four different states.

I think all of us who have wrestled with this have, by and large, believed that if you could get decently organized societies that took into account minority rights, they would be better off as citizens of a pluralistic Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Turkey. In some sense, Turkey might have been the best case for that, and the opening that President Erdogan, back when he was prime minister, did to the Kurds I think was one of the most promising and constructive things he's done in his time in office, and that now, unfortunately, has fallen by the wayside.

I think at the end of the day that's still the right answer, but right now things are so much in flux in the region that we may have to revisit this whole question about what the status of the

Kurds is depending on how well these other states hold together over time.

Senator Kaine. Mr. Ambassador?

Ambassador CROCKER. Great question, Senator. We have, of course, a long history with the Kurds of that region, and it isn't very pretty, particularly for them. I think above all what we need to do now is not, even with the best intentions, get them into a position where they are crossing red lines inside these states or across state boundaries, because we're probably not going to be around to back them up when the going gets rough. It's the same as, sadly, with the Christian communities.

We are seen, broadly speaking, as a great power that comes and then goes, and there's just a lot to support that in the broader region. So I think the first thing we need to do is see if we can turn the referendum and its failure into the beginning of a discussion of now what for them. I think all of us here feel this way. Sadly, there are more nationalisms than there are nations, and the one thing that Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria before 2011 all agreed on was no Kurdish state. Until that shifts, I think it would be the height of folly and of danger to encourage these aspirations on the part of the Kurds.

Senator Kaine. Mr. Chair, thank you.

Senator INHOFE. I thank you very much for bringing that up. We had both expressed a lot of concern back during the referendum time, and also one of the things that you may not be as aware of as we are, that Barzani has had a very close relationship with a lot of us over a lot of years, and it's been good.

We had decided, Senator Reed and I, that we would not have a second round. However, if either one of you want to pursue anything further, we can do that.

Let me just thank very much the panel. This has been a great panel. I kind of agree with what was stated by one of the members here, that you need to be appearing before one other committee that's out there.

I want to thank you, Ambassador Crocker, for bringing out our deficiencies in confirmations. That needs to be said.

Thank you very much for being here.

[Whereupon, at 11:59 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

